

# Chapter 1

## SETTING THE SCENE

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### Introduction

Prostitution has been evident across the centuries and across cultures. It was written about during the Byzantine Empire (324-1453 CE). The connection between sex work and AIDS has preoccupied researchers and health workers across the globe over the last 20 years (Kuate-Defo, 2004; McCamish, Storer, & Carl, 2000; Mutchler, 2004). Prostitution was evident on the streets of old London and it was transported along with convicts on the ships that were to herald the coming of white settlement to Australia (Damousi, 1995). It was spoken of as a moral blight on the early colonial landscape (House of Commons, 1838). Whether in the past or on the streets of 21<sup>st</sup> century Sydney, in the bars that dot the gay sector of this city, male prostitution—or sex work as it is now more commonly known—has been and continues to be as perennial and yet ever-changing as the seasons and the skyline of any modern city.

Across the 1,000 years of the Byzantine Empire, Church and State both grappled with the presence of prostitution. Prostitution was connected to poverty and slavery. It coexisted with child abuse and the overarching experiences of domination and conquest. These were the key themes in any understanding of premature sexualisation (Lascaratos & Poulakou-Rebelakou, 2000). In many respects little has changed. While slavery is no longer thought of as being

associated with adolescent and adult male prostitution, at least in Australia, it remains a theme in child and female prostitution in this country and in other places (Brockett & Murray, 1994; Kelly & Regan, 2000; Makkai, 2003; Outshoorn, 2005). Poverty is still viewed as a common reason for entering and remaining in male sex work. Domination and conquest emerge as themes in the stories of younger and older males who work *The Wall*, the central location for street-based male sex work in Sydney, Australia.

This chapter begins my exploration of this phenomenon: *street-based male sex work or prostitution* (SMSW) in a modern western city, in a land with a powerful history of isolation, conquest, domination, slavery, crime and punishment. I begin by noting the guiding questions behind this qualitative research project. I continue by exploring why this particular research project is of significance. I then clarify my use of the primary terms in this dissertation: male prostitution and male sex work. I end the chapter by providing an overview of the terrain to be covered in this dissertation.

## **Guiding research questions**

The question of resilience has been an abiding one over my 28 years of counselling work with marginalised adolescents and young adults. This interest was gradually transformed into a set of research questions inviting exploration. In essence, the questions are captured by the following overarching question: *why and how is it that some adolescents survive, and even flourish, in the face of adversity?* Essentially, the issue is about vulnerability and resilience, and this question points the way through my thinking about these two concepts and into this research that focuses on one particular group of young males. It is not simply a matter of noting that they *do* survive, although this is often a very powerful reality that commands attention; for it is first and foremost a question of *why* it is that they do survive and then *how* they achieve this. Thus, in the first instance, the task is to *understand the reality of their resilience* and their capacity to adapt in the face of

adversity. Only after an intensive focus on this reality is it possible to consider and explore the *how* of their survival — the thinking and the strategies that form the core of their adaptive responses.

Having pondering the *how* and *why* of survival and resilience, my mind often turns to questions of what this survival actually looks like. It is not simply about *survival*, although this is often a central part of the equation. At times, it is also about *flourishing*. However, I readily acknowledge that flourishing may not be common and survival may not always occur. Material in Table 1 and Appendix 2 outline some sobering realities in the lives of those I approached (44 in number) and the 27 young men whom I interviewed. Notwithstanding the sometimes maudlin sobriety that arises when I think about the loss and death that is so much a part of this *street scene*, I return inevitably to the living, because they are a constant reminder of the will to exist and the capacity to do more than simply survive. Thus the research question remains: *why and how is it that some adolescents survive, and even flourish, in the face of adversity?*

Adolescents are not a homogenous group of people, either here in Australia or anywhere else for that matter. Beyond the physical and cultural alignments and differences, as they develop as individuals, their thinking, psychological makeup and behaviour all carve out quite distinct pathways into the future. Even when they share common experiences such as an interest in RAP music, sport or dramatic pursuits, each adolescent adds his or her own nuance to the experience. To give flesh to this perennial and yet general research question, I explore notions of vulnerability, connectivity and resilience within a related and yet disparate group of adolescents and young adults who are commonly seen as particularly vulnerable: young males engaged in street-based sex work. By and large they come from Australia, although some of the participants were born and raised in other countries. They invariably began sex work during their teens and they all had some connection to *The Wall*. However, that is where the similarities cease and the differences emerge. It is what they do with their thoughts and experiences—at *The Wall*, in other places, and with various people—that motivates this research, for if there is survival and

flourishing, it is embedded within the places they frequent and is connected to the relationships they develop.

### **Significance of the research**

The primary purpose of this research, then, is to explore the rich experiences of the young males who work *The Walk*: their history, family experiences, travels, myriad events, relationships, aspirations, and stumbling blocks. It will become evident in Chapter 3 that while there is a significant body of literature about certain aspects of male sex work—principally, the negative antecedents and the equally negative experiences and consequences—there is very little research exploring what makes for their resilience and their survival and even less on the vehicles that carry such positive developments. Much of the prior research focuses on the reality of their lives from a pathological perspective: their practices as sex workers and the significant personal and public health risks. Lost in much of this research is the actual voice of the person for whom sex work is but one part of daily existence. The purpose of this research project has been to give voice to their lives, in all their complexity and richness, and without a desire to focus on one particular element over another. Some of the emergent themes resonate with previous research; others open up new terrain. It is the methodology and the exploration of new territory that makes this research rich in detail and significant in the development of our understanding in this area.

### **A clarification of primary terms**

While prostitution is often spoken of as the world's oldest profession, it is far from a singular or homogeneous form of trans-historical and trans-cultural behaviour (Scambler & Scambler, 1997). Our current form of prostitution involves a cluster of activities carried out in

different ways and under different conditions (Melrose, 2002). Prostitution is also known as *sex work*. Indeed, care is taken in this work to consistently avoid the use of the term *sex worker* or *prostitute* for as McMullen (1987) indicates, “... ‘prostitution’ is behaviour—not a person—and a ‘prostitute’ is merely a term which describes a person’s behaviour” (p. 35). However, as this current research will show, while there are some common experiences shared by most, if not all, males engaged in sex work, the activities that make up this broad experience of prostitution and sex work are many and varied, and are not always connected with the commodification of sexual experiences.

Terminology is crucial in research; it is an essential aspect of understanding difference, but it is also the place where difference is most visible and confusion most apparent. At the conclusion of this work, and as a part of the appendices, I provide a glossary of terms (Appendix 1). It is made up of some technical concepts (about which there is general scientific and social agreement), place names specific to the research, and a collection of colloquialisms used by the participants in this study. While I recognise that not all of the participants use these colloquial terms as specifically as I have defined them, it is necessary to provide the reader with a guide. This has been undertaken on the understanding that defining these terms is reductionist: an attempt at developing a consistent and common understanding where it may not exist.

The primary terminology used in this research consists of the two terms already mentioned, the usage of which requires clarification. Early research consistently used the term *male prostitution*. More recent research has tended to use the term, *male sex work*. The use of *male prostitution* often carries a pejorative quality, and the adoption of the term *male sex work* by researchers and advocates was a response to this pathologising trend. The aim, in part, was to remove the stigma associated with male prostitution, to focus on other issues (such as health and sex work practices), and in part, to industrialise and hence legitimise prostitution within society (Prestage & Perkins, 1994). There are criticisms of the term *sex work* (and associated terms) within

research, particularly when children are involved; it is argued that these terms serve as euphemisms that obscure the reality of child abuse (Melrose, 2002).

While acknowledging these conceptual arguments, in the current research the socio-political arguments and nuances are not considered in any detail, and the terms *male sex work* and *male prostitution* are used interchangeably with no negative connotations apart from the nuance provided by the participants. This decision was taken to reflect the practice of the participants. Within any given interview, both terms were used — in some cases used interchangeably. Sometimes a term was nuanced by a particular participant, and hence a negative or positive connotation is evident. At other times the terms are simply used in a *matter of fact* style and with no apparent overtone. Where there appeared to be a nuance in the use of one or other of the terms—for example, “they think that I’m a prostitute and they think that I’m scum of the earth” [Brian 12a(291)]—the nuance is evident from the context. No effort has been made to cleanse the text of any negative or positive nuances.

## Overview of the dissertation

Male prostitution, or sex work as we know it today, can only be understood as part of the more complex tapestry of Western society’s ever-developing understanding of homosexuality and masculinity, imbued as it often has been with violent attempts at suppressing one man’s attraction towards, or intimacy with, another. I note, rather than explore, these dark and mostly negative historical themes. That said, young males still skulk in the darkness of the night or the backroom of a club, carefully (or not so carefully) seeking out someone with whom to negotiate a sexual transaction to maintain their survival or lifestyle. It remains a personal and social activity frowned upon by most citizens. Soliciting is still a statute offence in Sydney, Australia, punishable, not by death, but by penalty points and fines that, if left unattended, result in a period

of detention in gaol. All together, these are powerful historical and present day realities that cast an influence over the person within the phenomenon that is street-based sex work.

The focus of this research is not primarily historical, nor is it criminological. Although these issues arise in both the literature and the text of this research, the primary focus is on the experiences of those engaged in this much maligned and sometimes feared activity, as viewed through their own eyes. I begin, in Chapter 1 by setting the research scene. I focus on the questions that guide this research and on the choice of participants: those engaged in street-based sex work. I also examine the significance of the research. I clarify terminology and provide a rationale for use of terms. Finally, I provide an overview of the dissertation.

In Chapter 2, I review the literature in this area, with particular emphasis on understanding the different, and sometimes conflicting, research perspectives on male sex work and those who engage in this activity. From the pathologising perspective that dominates early research—the legacy of centuries of social fear and moralising—through to an inevitable emphasis (post 1983) on HIV/AIDS, substance use, and other experiences that compromise the health and wellbeing of both those who engage in sex work, and the public; it is a complex and still developing area of psychosocial and health exploration.

In Chapter 3, I return to the issue of the research landscape and provide a brief examination of the research ground. I explore the geographical place, the interlocutors in the qualitative interviews, and the theoretical tradition in which the researcher is located. I explore notions of *the stranger* and *the foreigner*, of interpretive social science as a foundation for psychosocial research, and my focus on the impact of the *background* — the frame of reference drawn from individual history and shared understandings. I also explore the importance of *dialogical movements* as the place from which human understanding emerges. Within this dialogical and interpretive context, I note my connections to street-based sex work, my experience of *The Wall* and the impact of this *background* material on the research. Before I present the findings of my own research, I continue Chapter 3 by examining the methodology and research design for

the dissertation: the thinking and processes behind the fine-grained analysis of 27 unstructured in-depth interviews using a variant form of grounded theory.

I begin in Chapter 4—the first of the analysis chapters—by exploring four indicative narratives in street-based male sex work. It is an intense and detailed way of introducing both the individuals concerned and, through the themes that emerge, the entire group of participants. Moving beyond the misconceptions of what it means to be a male prostitute, the four narratives allow for the gentle unfolding of a more complex and humane picture of street-based sex work. In this detailed unfolding, these young men emerge as complex characters with complex stories: the Christian kid who is ostracised at school and then gradually disappeared to the city, the little boy whose older brother knew it all and initiated the child into the ways of the world, the miracle country lad who fell in love, lost love and explored his sexuality in public, the city adolescent who became homeless, did sex work to survive and lost his virginity all on the same day. No longer the stranger or the foreigner, they are ordinary people. They have families, friends, their own moral dilemmas and struggles. They succeed and they fail. They are, perhaps, just like you and me.

In Chapter 5, I further explore the life narratives of these 27 young men. This chapter develops a central theme present in all of their lives: that of relationships. Relationships were ever-present for each participant in this research: at the beginning of life, in some form as they moved away from home, on their way to or at *The Wall*, with clients, and with self. Their relationships are the vehicles that carry the rich stories that make them who they are in the world.

Some relationships are of greater significance than others. Chapter 6 explores the place of education in the lives of those who have engaged in street-based sex work. Whether in its presence or absence, education is central to the understanding that each of the participants had of their past, present and future. What is significant in the findings is that it is the people, the environment and the content of education that are crucial in the development of a sense of self and of future.

In Chapter 7, I bring together what can only be seen as the disparate threads of the life narratives herein explored. After a brief examination of the research on *vulnerability* and *resilience*, I focus on the presence of vulnerability, the reality of connectivity or connectedness and the paradoxical, and yet unquenchable, presence of resilience in the lives of young males who engaged in street-based sex work. Finally, I turn to a consideration of the implications for this research for family, friends and the social environment, and for the critical social systems in our community: health, welfare and education. I finish this dissertation being astounded at and uplifted by this vulnerable, yet connected and resilient group of young males: their grace in mire, their thoughtfulness in chaos, and their sensitivity and openness to change and development. I remain an observer of and yet participant in, their developing resilience.

## Chapter 2

### A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON MALE PROSTITUTION AND SEX WORK

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#### Introduction

The majority of the population in Sydney, Australia, gain what little exposure they have to prostitution or sex work through the rare mention of it in the popular press and the electronic media rather than through first hand contact. There is little doubt that this level of ignorance is repeated across the globe. City dwellers and those who regularly drive through inner city streets and back alleys are the exception to this general rule. Both male and female prostitution has long been readily visible, to those who move in, through or near the back streets and red light areas of Sydney, or any other city for that matter. Tourist strips, with gaudy lighting and ever-insistent spruikers, are a common aspect of that part of the red light district where men seek out scantily clad females, who either gyrate on dance poles in seedy clubs or pace the footpaths at all hours of the day and night. Male prostitution or sex work is another matter altogether. It is a curious phenomenon regarded publicly as aberrant and hence even more discreetly embedded within the inner reaches of the city. Dark streets and corners, toilet blocks, parks, bars and the loggia of the

main city railway station; these are the habitat of young males who seek male sexual contact at a price.

A literature search was carried out exploring Current Contents, PsycINFO, PubMed, Social Services Abstracts and Sociological Abstracts as well as a metasearch of relevant journals. This literature review sheds light on the phenomenon of male sex work. I explore male sex work in general and specifically in relation to Australia. I begin with a brief examination of the early colonial period in Australian history (1788 to 1888) before examining the dominant themes and emphases within the scholarly literature over more recent decades. As the language and emphasis has shifted and developed, a more complex examination of the phenomenon has also developed. As such, I also consider the many interrelated issues that, combined with the sex work experience, go to make up the person within the phenomenon of male sex work or prostitution. Finally, and beyond both the historical analysis and more current developments, I note the gaps that remain to be explored in future research.

### **Male prostitution and the early colony of Australia**

Male prostitution, be it historical or current, can only ever be understood within its rich social context and history. Australia began as a convict settlement in 1788. As well as the transportation of criminals, other less visible social phenomena were transported and thrived in the early colony. In this section of the literature review, I provide a brief overview of that historical context and the place of male prostitution in Australia's early history and into modernity.

### **Homoeroticism in the colony of New South Wales**

Understanding the place of male prostitution within Australia begins, in part, with an understanding of the place of homosexuality in the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. *Homosexuality* is

not a construct that can be used in relation to the early colonial era; it is a literary and human rights invention, first used in 1862 by Károly Mária Kertbeny (Herzer, 1986). However in London, the originating port for much of the white population that were transported to the new colony, homoerotic behaviour and male to male sex were common. It was clandestine behaviour, largely restricted to the anonymity of a chaotic city such as London or to protected aristocratic circles (Ackroyd, 2000; Trumbach, 1977).

Notwithstanding these two major contexts, homoerotic activity and male to male sex were also common on British ships, as indicated by the numerous ship and court room trials that resulted in a variety of punishments: from the lash to the hangman's noose (House of Commons, 1838; Stuart, 1979; Trumbach, 1977). In 1838, and in response to complaints from the colony about transportation, and the moral and legal state of the colony, the House of Commons of the British Parliament initiated an inquiry into the transportation of convicts to New South Wales (House of Commons, 1838). Among other activities said to cause chaos, disorder and depravity in the transportation process and in the colony, homoerotic activity was mentioned by several of the witnesses (House of Commons, 1838).

Sydney was the staging ground for other penal settlements within the colony: Moreton Bay, Port Arthur and Norfolk Island being the secondary penal settlements in the colony of New South Wales. Robert Pringle Stuart provided his own graphic assessment of the state of the colony after visiting the penal colony of Norfolk Island. In his account, a report to the Comptroller-General dated June 20, 1846 (58 years after the establishment of the colony), Stuart noted the presence of abuse and coercion within these homoerotic encounters. He also provided information that allows for another interpretation — that some homoerotic activity was about affection to which the authorities attributed criminality. As he noted,

It is lamentable to observe that the natural course of affection is quite distracted and that these parties manifest as much eager earnestness for the society of each other as members of the opposite sex. (Stuart, 1979, p. 46)

However, it was not simply the company of the same sex and it was not just sexual satisfaction that was occurring. What he found was a large collection of convict men, some of whom vie for each other's affection through a "seduction that is systematically prosecuted" (Stuart, 1979, p. 46). As Stuart continued to explain, these relationships are "not unusually viewed by the convicts", and in fact, "are equally respected by some of them" and are "... a source of jealousy, rivalry, intrigue and conflict" (Stuart, 1979, p. 46). And to complete his analysis of the status of these male to male relationships, he indicated that,

I am told, and I believe, that upwards of 100—I have heard that as many as 150—couples can be pointed out, who habitually associate for this most detestable intercourse, and moral perception is so completely absorbed that they are said to be "married", "man and wife" &c. (Stuart, 1979, p. 46)

What is important to note from this brief assessment of the colonial scene and the formal literature is that homoerotic behaviour and relationships in the early decades of white settlement in Australia were viewed from within a highly charged, historico-legal, and moral frame of reference. The behaviour was scorned, and when detected, was punished severely, often by means of execution (Gilbert, 1976; Minichiello & Bowers, 2001; Trumbach, 1977). It was nevertheless present in various parts of the colony in complex and intricate forms.

### **Male prostitution in the early colonial era**

While homoerotic activity was an undeniable and institutionally detested part of Australia's early history, primary sources provide limited documentary evidence that male prostitution was a part of the colonial life of New South Wales during the convict period. Having said that, there existed a milieu where survival sex, and perhaps prostitution, was inevitable.

Male prostitution was an entrenched and named aspect of British culture (Scott, 2003a). We have already seen that much of early Australian behaviour was influenced not simply by the environment of our harsh land but also by the threads of British culture that were likewise transported to the colony of New South Wales (Ackroyd, 2000; Trumbach, 1977). The trial and

punishment of male to male sodomy in general, and male prostitution specifically, were public events in Britain. They were incorporated into public discourse (Ackroyd, 2000; Karlen, 1971). More specific to this study, sodomy and male prostitution were evident in the military and the navy, both of which were core institutions in the early colonial era in Australia (Gilbert, 1976; Simes, 1992). The developing milieu could not have avoided being influenced by such public activities and the discourse surrounding them.

As previously indicated, female prostitution arose not simply because of men's sexual demands but also because of the desperate nature of living in an inhospitable land with limited resources and a need to survive. Men and boys also suffered the same lack of resources, and so vagrancy, delinquency and homelessness were common experiences for those who were once convicts (Damousi, 1997). We know from Robert Pringle Stuart, as stated above, that a good percentage of the men in some colonial outposts formed homoerotic relationships. What we also know from his reports and correspondence is that:

There are those [at Norfolk Island] known to be, and called, common prostitutes, who for a trifling consideration surrender themselves for the odious purpose. Instances in number could be adduced, and there cannot be a shadow of doubt on the subject, that the whole building [the gaol] is a nest of unnatural crime. (Stuart, 1979, p. 46)

It is not simply in the gaol but in the hospital as well, and the affection experienced within these relationships, be they "man and wife" or "common prostitute" or "seducer" are powerful representations not simply of lust and sexual expression but of affection and emotional ties:

Go to the gaol and the knowledge of the association of these wretched criminals is manifested in this; that if A be confined for any offence today, B is confidently expected to make his appearance tomorrow, nor is this expectation disappointed. He has committed some offence that they may not be separated. Go to the hospital! if C is admitted or exempted today, D is sure to stand in need of treatment or exemption, as the case may be, the day following, and he is expected to present himself, nor does he disappoint the anticipation. (Stuart, 1979, p. 46)

These are complex relationships, hard to fathom or categorise at this historical distance and from a cultural standpoint so completely separated from that place and time. Notwithstanding that difficulty, same-gender relationships existed. Sometimes they were between older and younger

men and boys. Sometimes they were viewed from the outside as a marriage, while at other times an act of prostitution.

A brief examination of New South Wales Supreme Court depositions found a number of trials for unnatural crimes that resemble what contemporary research literature refers to as *survival sex* (Clatts, Goldsamt, Yi, & Viorst Gwadz, 2005; Solorio, Milburn, Weiss, & Batterham, 2006). In one case, there was promise of money or clothing in exchange for or as a part of sexual favours (NSW Supreme Court, 1887). In another case, sexual favours were exchanged for food (NSW Supreme Court, 1871). In a final case, sexual favours were exchanged for a parrot (NSW Supreme Court, 1855). Whether these were, in effect, the first criminal trials for male prostitution is impossible to ascertain. What can be concluded is that it was male to male sex, that survival was an issue in some cases, and that there was an exchange of goods or money in return for sexual favours.

### **Summary comments on early formulations**

If male prostitution did not exist within the colony in any widespread manner, the idea and experience of it was certainly present in the history of London: in the transportation process, and the convict world. The social environment—the absence of women, poverty, homelessness and general destitution in the early years of the colony—created the context where sex between men occurred in a variety of ways. Homoerotic contact was evident in many parts of the colony and male prostitution was evident on Norfolk Island. The early colony was a tough environment marked by tragedy and harsh conditions. It also began as a place where the social and political discourse was dominated by crime, deviance and social control. While this was the general tenor of the discourse around male prostitution everywhere (Scott et al., 2005), it takes on particular significance when male prostitution occurs within a penal settlement.

## **Modern research directions on male prostitution**

The study by Freyhan (1947) of a young white male prostitute being admitted to a psychiatric hospital to be treated for homosexuality and involvement in prostitution was one of the earliest pieces of research on male prostitution (Scott, 2003a). It established the tone and preoccupations of research into male prostitution, which were linked to either aberrations of identity (homosexuality) or aberrations of life purpose and direction (delinquency). Either way, a medical perspective dominated early and scant research within the modern era (e.g., Gandy & Deisher, 1970; Vanwesenbeeck, 2001).

Haley, Roy, Leclerc, Boudreau and Boivin (2004) confirm the long held view of the context for street-based male sex work or prostitution. The participants are “street youth ... aged 25 years or less who have dropped out of school, are without regular employment, and live in precarious conditions, often with little social support from their families or community. These youths lack marketable skills for meeting daily needs and have few opportunities for legitimately supporting themselves. Many of them must rely on illegal activities such as begging, stealing, selling drugs, or trading sex in order to survive” (p. 526). While this quasi-definition does not deal with the precursor events that are said to lead towards leaving school, unemployment and unemployability, it does summarise the common views about the context of male prostitution. However, even at the early stages of research, there were different perspectives on male prostitution (Allen, 1980; Earls & David, 1989a, 1989b), and it is these evolving modern perspectives that must be explored at this stage of the literature review.

## **Public discourse and early Sydney research**

In her discourse analysis of the New York newspapers on the “runaway youth problem” between 1960 and 1978, Staller (2003) notes that while runaway girls were readily connected with prostitution, runaway boys were invariably viewed as being in search of adventure (Kaye, 2003).

Male prostitution was rarely mentioned and this was a discourse-trend that did not shift until the late 1970s and into the 1980s, when several young female prostitutes were murdered in New York. At that point, the media coverage moved onto the more serious arena of “missing children” (Fritz & Altheide, 1987). Accompanying this coverage on missing children was a generalised speculation about what occurred while they were missing.

A search of the main Sydney broadsheet newspapers for the period 1842 to 1987 found no references to male prostitution. References in the media since 1987—largely stimulated by judicial inquiries into police and state corruption—tend to group commentary on male prostitution into one of three categories: criminality, and in particular the association between police and governmental corruption and male prostitution (Brown, 1996; Power, 1998); HIV and AIDS (Monaghan, 1987); and/or a more sociological examination of male sex work, emphasising either more positive characteristics such as their education (Jamieson, 1999) or their vulnerability to abuse within an unregulated context (Forbes, 1999). In the case of female sex work, the references occur more often and are focussed on sex slavery (Gibson, 2006) or their susceptibility to issues of mental health (Horan, 2006) and physical harm (AAP, 2006).

An article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* in May 1988 spoke of how male prostitution had occurred along Darlinghurst Road “for the past 20 years”, but that the local police commander, on the advice of the Attorney-General, indicated that new legislation would mean the end to male prostitution in that place. “They’ve been given the message”, indicated Chief Superintendent Bob Stafford, “and they know they have to go” (Stapleton, 1988, p. 7). Unsurprisingly, despite police warnings and a royal commission of inquiry into areas touching on prostitution, street-based sex work continues along Darlinghurst Road in 2007. It is no doubt the same in other cities around the globe, on every night of the year, sometimes against the trend toward zero tolerance, and the efforts by some to morally cleanse the polis of street-based sex work (Hubbard, 2004).

Such was the ignorance and invisibility of male sex work in Sydney in the 1980s that a New South Wales Parliamentary inquiry into prostitution (Parliament of New South Wales,

1986), using research from the then NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, cited only 14 males engaged in prostitution (Travis, 1986). While the study was time limited, as Travis indicated, “these interviews represent almost the entire population of male streetwalkers at that time” (p. 83). Although only one of the respondents in her study indicated that he was under 18 years of age, Travis also noted that “the respondents were younger as a group than their given ages indicate”, and “one respondent commented that 30 per cent of the males were either 16 or 17 years old” (pp. 84, 93). This was the first inquiry into male prostitution or sex work in New South Wales but it was not where research into male prostitution or sex work in the modern era began to develop.

As there was very little research between that point and the 1970s, it is unsurprising that Caukins and Coombs (1976) indicate that “the matter [of male prostitution] has been ignored, and our policy as a people has been one of organized silence” (p. 450). Associated with this silence (Pettersson & Tiby, 2003) was a generalised stigma around all forms of prostitution: a situation that still abounds (Edlund & Korn, 2002; Morrison & Whitehead, 2005; Scott et al., 2005). This has affected the way both professionals and researchers have interacted with prostitution and those engaged with it. Since that early work by Freyhan (1947), health and welfare – be it physical or mental – has generally been the dominant focus of attention in any research work on male prostitution, at least until the last decade. The emphasis was on “treating” the young “delinquent” male engaged in prostitution through “practical welfare of medical interventions” (Scott, 2003a, p. 184). This same pathologising language is evident in recent research by Thrane, Hoyt, Whitbeck, and Yoder (2006) whose focus is on the “deviant subsistence strategies” employed by homeless rural youth (p. 1117).

Notwithstanding such a pathologising research trend, the last three decades have seen the scientific discourse on male prostitution and sex work change, reaching a point in recent research where the emphasis is diverse and multifaceted. Themes that emerged in the early literature remain but are couched within less judgemental terms. New and dominating themes

have developed since the advent of HIV. A burgeoning interest in adolescence and resilience has seen male prostitution viewed as a part of a broader matrix of events within a context of both vulnerability and resilience. Prostitution is now considered in diverse ways. While still being viewed as deviant in some research, it is now also considered within an industrial framework as well as a matter of personal and public health issues. New forms of sex work have emerged with the advent of the Internet. The purpose of this section of the literature review is to explore the various ways that male prostitution and sex work have been considered over those decades.

### **A context of social and personal pathology**

Historically, and as far back as ancient times, prostitution has long been associated with negative experiences (Lascaratos & Poulakou-Rebelakou, 2000). While the male engaged in prostitution was viewed as a victim of social disorder or pathological social movements (Brannigan & Van Brunschot, 1997), they “were [also] considered abnormal” in their own right (Scott et al., 2005, p. 321). Attention has been given to the psychological characteristics of psychosis, anxiety and hostility (Simon, Morse, Osofsky, Balson, & Gaumer, 1992) and deviance (Lindquist, White, Tutchings, & Chambers, 1989; Luckenbill, 1984, 1986; McCarthy & Hagan, 1992a). The coexistence of sex work has been linked with imprisonment (Allerton et al., 2003; Kenny et al., 2006) and homelessness (Stephens, Braithwaite, Lubin, Carn, & Colbert, 2000; Tyler & Johnson, 2006). Prostitution viewed within a research context of social and personal pathology has dominated the literature for decades.

Recent work by Kaye (2003), Scott (2003a) and others (Saphira & Oliver, 2002; Vanwesenbeeck, 2001) brings to light the history of scientific discourse on male prostitution and the frames of reference through which male prostitution or sex work has been considered during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries. Scott (2003a) notes that the classification or typing of males in sex work or prostitution has been significant in past research.

Allen (1980) and others (Caukins & Coombs, 1976; Coleman, 1989; Earls & David, 1989a, 1989b; Luckenbill, 1986) have focussed on the psychosocial elements of “prostitutes”. The aetiological exploration of male prostitution has been dominated by the themes of “coercion” and “seduction” (Scott, 2003a, pp. 191-193). Early and more recent research literature has focussed on the child or adolescent as the victim of nefarious adult activity. Mehta, Bhatt and Gore (1979) highlight the problems of being a *kidnapped* child in India. Victimisation is the major frame of reference and so the child is viewed as being subjected to “circumstances leading to victimisation” and of “falling victim to sex delinquency” (p. 620). This has been a consistent theme in both the research (Walker, 2002) and social policy and advocacy literature (Fitzgerald, 1997; Martyn, 1998), where the focus is on children, exploitation and trafficking, and prostitution occurring within this coercive context.

### **Negative antecedents to male sex work**

While some are critical of what is perceived as an “obsession with the dark side” of adolescent experience (Ayman-Nolley & Taira, 2000, p. 42), one of the dominant motifs in the research literature on young people over the last few decades has been the negative antecedent experiences of male prostitution or sex work. This work has considered issues of causality in respect to these experiences and the person’s later involvement in male prostitution (McMullen, 1987). As Shaw and Butler (1998) and Abramovich (2005) indicate “there is a widespread though not universal agreement that sexual abuse, neglect, problems at school, social class, membership of young offender peer groups, unemployment, problems of shelter, and life on the streets are particularly associated with the incidence of youth prostitution” (Shaw & Butler, 1998, p. 184). It is clear that “the largest strand of previous research in this field has focussed on disentangling aspects of cause and effect” (, p. 182).

There is a significant amount of research literature that focuses on the impact of either being in a family with little attendant care or being outside the family. This research focuses on

exposure to uncontrolled influences and the concurrence of risk-taking behaviour and negative outcomes (Abramovich, 2005; Dorais, 2004). The research also notes the concurrence of a variety of experiences with prostitution. These include: homelessness (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1989; Milburn et al., 2005; Rotheram-Borus, Meyer-Bahlburg, Rosario et al., 1992; Sanchez, Waller, & Greene, 2006; The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1995); sexual abuse and sexual risk behaviour (Steel & Herlitz, 2005); disconnectedness from family and peers (Mallett, Rosenthal, Myers, Milburn, & Rotheram-Borus, 2004); poverty and economic imperatives (Belza et al., 2001; Rigi, 2003); mental health issues (Zima et al., 1999); and sexually transmitted infections (Tyler, Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Yoder, 2000). Brannigan and Van Brunschot (1997), when commenting on a decade of “runaway studies”, indicate that “abuse certainly appears to be a major contributor to leaving home early, but the problems seem to arise from a host of conditions including, but hardly limited to, incest and/or sexual abuse. Family disruptions and sexual precocity are also implicated. In addition, the involvement in prostitution is largely opportunistic, with runaways just as likely to end up shoplifting or dealing drugs as going into prostitution, or doing all three” (p. 344).

### **Causality and predisposition**

A number of researchers and commentators assert a strong causal relationship between dysfunctional family life, abuse, running away from home, other negative experiences, and involvement in prostitution (Walker, 2002). Coleman (1989) explores a theoretical model that examines a causal nexus between predisposing factors, situational factors, and eventual involvement in prostitution. From this psychological perspective, prostitution is said to be a consequence of “early disruption of psychosexual and psychosocial development” (p. 140), where “boys who have been abused as children and who are exposed to situational variables that make male prostitution activity a logical survival mechanism are individuals at high risk for developing self-destructive prostitution activities” (p. 147). Coombs (1974) and others pursue a similar line

of inquiry focussing on the individual psychopathology experienced by the individuals involved in sex work (El-Bassel et al., 2000; Simon et al., 1992). They also examine the largely negative psychodynamics in the worker-customer relationship (Caukins & Coombs, 1976), and the intrapsychic events which underpin involvement in prostitution (Hutto & Faulk, 2000).

Some studies posit the strongest direct connection between sexual abuse and engagement in prostitution in females (Chandy, Blum, & Resnick, 1996). Other research indicates that males are more likely than females to be involved in prostitution (Pedersen & Hegna, 2003). In at least one study, prostitution is defined in terms of “delinquency”, and is categorised alongside “beating up on another person, group fights, stealing from stores, cheating on a test, running away from home, stealing from home” (Chandy, Blum, & Resnick, 1997, p. 8).

Holmes and Slap (1998) posit a clear causal connection between sexual abuse in boys and subsequent involvement in prostitution. Other researchers concur with this link (Widom & Ames, 1994; Widom & Kuhns, 1996). However, the vast majority of studies are less certain about any direct causal connection between any particular experience, such as sexual abuse, and subsequent involvement in prostitution. They nonetheless acknowledge that a significant number of those engaged in prostitution have also experienced sexual abuse as children (Bartholow et al., 1994; Earls & David, 1989b; Parsons, Bimbi, & Halkitis, 2001). For example, Seng (1989) picks up on the theme of sexual abuse and indicates that “it appears that the link between sexual abuse and adolescent prostitution is not direct, but requires runaway behaviour as an intervening variable. It is not so much that sexual abuse leads to prostitution as it is that running away leads to prostitution” (p. 673).

Sexual abuse is not the only negative antecedent in the lives of those who engage in male prostitution. McCarthy and Hagan (1992b) examined a variety of dependent and independent variables that contribute to an understanding of male prostitution. These include stealing food, serious theft and prostitution as dependent variables, with unemployment, hunger, instability of housing, a coercive style of parenting, sexual abuse, school issues and family

intactness as the independent variables (cf. McCarthy & Hagan, 1992a). In their study and many others, it is a process of the young male being pre-dispositioned to a life where prostitution is more likely to occur. Earls and David (1989b) carried out a controlled study with 50 “male prostitutes” and 50 “nonprostitutes” that also considered similar dependent and independent variables in order to examine causal connections between personal and environmental factors and subsequent involvement in male prostitution. They indicate that “the most parsimonious explanation of male prostitution we can offer is one based on probabilities, e.g., the probability of engaging in prostitution increases with the presence of the following variables: youth (since it appears to be a salable [sic] quality), early seductive or rewarded sexual experience with a male, a homosexual orientation, and a lack of marketable job skills ( limited alternatives)” (p. 417).

Thus, the only reliable “hypothesised relationship” (Widom & Ames, 1994, p. 312) is that abuse leads to running (Bagley & Young, 1987; Hyde, 2005) and initiation into or increased substance abuse (Tyler et al., 2000), which in turn leads to a variety of negative experiences such as criminal activity (Smith, Ireland, & Thornberry, 2005) and involvement with a geographical and social environment where involvement with prostitution is more likely to occur (McCarthy & Hagan, 1992a; Nadon, Koverola, & Schludermann, 1998; Rotheram-Borus, Meyer-Bahlburg, Koopman et al., 1992; Schaffer & DeBlassie, 1984).

Two comments may be made in this section that relate to personal and environmental issues. First, while challenging the notion of a necessary causal connection between childhood sexual abuse and later prostitution, Allen (1980) highlights the complexity of the male sex work or prostitution environment, and avoids simple causal links and reductionist thinking regarding either the person’s background or his future. As Allen (1980) notes, “they may wind up as derelicts, in prison, or as successful business and professional men” (p. 420). So while much of the literature deals with predisposing and situational factors that pathologise and lead inexorably to negative behaviour such as prostitution, there is also a questioning of the whole thesis that early or premature sexual experiences necessarily result in negative outcomes (Phoenix, 2002).

The second point relates to, and sheds further light on, the issue of necessary outcomes from early sexualisation. Holmes and Slap (1998) are perhaps the strongest proponents in this review on the negative sequelae of child sexual abuse and the direct causal connection between sexual abuse and involvement in prostitution. An important contrary position on their position has been put forward by Bauserman and Rind (1997). Others (Potterat & Brody, 1999; Rind, 2001, 2005; Rind, Bauserman, & Tromovitch, 1999) also question a direct and necessary causal connection between early sexualisation and negative outcomes. Apart from critiquing the methodology and scope of the work by Holmes and Slap (1998), Bauserman and Rind (1997) come to the conclusion that early sexualisation does not necessarily produce compromised emotions, a fragmentation of the self in childhood and adolescence, or negative adjustment in adulthood (cf. Paul, Catania, Pollack, & Stall, 2001). A capacity for nurturance, care and a positive response within the family can be more significant to positive or negative outcomes after early sexualisation than the experience itself. The age of the person at the time of the experience is also important as is the nature and strength of peer affiliations. Finally, and importantly, the content of the experience (e.g., level of coercion, existence of harm, and relationship to the adult) is also influential on whether there is a positive or negative outcome as a consequence of early or premature sexualisation (Bauserman & Rind, 1997; Finkelhor, 1990; Lynskey & Fergusson, 1997).

The research and analysis by Bauserman and Rind (1997) and others (Potterat & Brody, 1999; Rind, 2001, 2005; Rind et al., 1999) adds weight to the notion that early sexualisation is not a direct cause of involvement in male prostitution and that other negative experiences may be more influential with respect to involvement in sex work or prostitution. Moving away from a perspective that views prostitution predominantly as a question of victimisation allows other themes to emerge from the experience. Two of those that require some exploration are the *motives* for entry into prostitution and the *choices* that are made by those engaged in male prostitution.

## Motives and choices

Delinquency, deviant peer cultures (Johnson, Whitbeck, & Hoyt, 2005; Luckenbill, 1984, 1986; Peretti-Watel & Moatti, 2006; Ross, 2002) and survival (Barrett & Beckett, 1996; Cameron, Collins, & Thew, 1999; Lankenau, Clatts, Welle, Goldsamt, & Gwadz, 2005) have been consistent themes in the literature on male sex work. Street-based prostitution is one of a number of “deviant subsistence strategies”. It is a form of “street victimisation” that results from homelessness, unemployment and a lack of family care (Thrane et al., 2006, p. 1126). While the theme of negative early life experiences dominate in the literature, it is also important to view male sex work or prostitution from the perspective of agency. Even adolescents make choices and some of those choices—considered or otherwise—move them beyond the victim frame and into other ways of viewing their experience.

A number of researchers focus on the choices that are made by young males who become involved in prostitution or sex work. The choices imply more agency in the process than is considered in studies that focus more on the impact of personal experience and the influence of a negative environment (Cates, 1989; Cates & Markley, 1992). An early review of the research by Schaffer and DeBlassie (1984) noted a range of motivations for entering male prostitution. They included economic necessity, homelessness, power and importance, adventure and the financing of substance use. This research focuses on the decisions and risks taken by those involved in SMSW (Haley et al., 2004; Perkins & Bennett, 1985; Prestage, 1994). It utilises the personal accounts of those engaged in the prostitution scene (Boyd, 2000; Goodley, 1994; Rosen, 2000; Valenzuela, 2000).

While not ignoring the environmental influences of poverty, homelessness and street-life, Lankenau, Clatts, Welle, Goldsamt, and Gwadz (2005) focus on the economic aspects of prostitution: the “street capital” that is generated and the “street competencies” that are “inculcated” into the sex worker by the SMSW environment (p. 12). While not ignoring the realities attached to being homeless—such as the use of drugs and involvement in criminality—

research by Lankenau and his colleagues (2005) is indicative of a shift away from a more pathologising approach. It represents the shift to a discourse focussing on different and nonetheless significant realities that also exist within prostitution: work, skill, the alternative economy, a street career. These last two areas of research—choice and the street economy—while not completely new, have marked out a different territory for research. This next section outlines the development of those *different conceptual frameworks* in respect of male sex work.

### **Different conceptual frameworks**

In previous sections, I have reviewed the research literature that considers male prostitution from the perspective of criminology, deviance, social control and abnormality (Scott et al., 2005; Thukral & Ditmore, 2003). Some early work attempted to break away from these perspectives, and more recent research and commentary has consolidated that shift (Goodyear & Cusick, 2007). These new perspectives are less pathologising of the person and the phenomenon. They explore the person and the experience of male prostitution from sociological, psychosocial and health perspectives. They aim to deepen our understanding of the cultural, social, personal lifestyle, relational, emotional, and attitudinal elements of the phenomenon. An early mixed method study of male prostitution by Boyer (1989) focussed on “male prostitution as a cultural phenomenon that is produced from cultural constructions of sex and gender” (p. 178). Boyer’s shift from the personal and the pathological to a more social constructionist framework broadened our understanding of male sex work. Her study highlights the process of identity formation and posits that young males with a homosexual orientation view involvement in prostitution as a part of that identity formation. While the approach by Boyer ran counter to the early and dominant deviance-based literature, it was also different to the later problem-based focus on HIV and AIDS. It injected into the literature ideas that were also taking shape in the sociological literature around gender, masculinity and sexuality. Before exploring a number of

different conceptual frameworks on male sex work that are less pathologising, I turn first, in brief, to this larger body of background theorising and research on gender, masculinity and sexuality.

### **Gender, masculinity and sexuality**

Those males who engage in sex work, like their non-sex work peers, are influenced by spoken and unspoken social pressure to be the *right sort of male*. In the Western world, the hegemonic model is said to be largely devoid of the feminine (Kimmel, 1994). In this diverse body of literature, the emphasis is on repudiation and dominance as a way to create place and identity in the world (Franklin, 2000; Plummer, 1999; Thorne, 1993). Research notes that this social construction of masculinity, where young males are enculturated into a particular way of seeing the world and relationships, is often affirmed or unchallenged by authority. Two examples of where this occurs are in the class-room (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1995) and in sport (Griffin, 1995). The feminine is one manifestation of *otherness* and *otherness* tends to be estranged (Keddie, 2003). The social force of a hegemonic masculinity values some modes of being and opposes others. It is a constant, pervasive and often negative force in identity formation for young males. The negativity and alienation that result are stronger in some social and cultural settings than in others (Bell, 2000; Graziano, 2004; Rosario, Rotheram-Borus, & Reid, 1996). For some young male homosexuals, coming to terms with issues of masculinity and identity means dealing with a hostile social environment where negative personal outcomes, such as violence and suicide, are far from atypical (McDaniel, Purcell, & D'Augelli, 2001; Savin-Williams, 2001b).

*Subordinated masculinities*, such as homosexuality, are often referred to in pejorative terms (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Thurlow, 2001). Within this context, gay males are considered to be "at the bottom of a gendered hierarchy among men" (Connell, 1995, p. 78). They are the *other* that struggles to survive (Tomsen & Mason, 2001). Beyond the subtle, invisible, but

nonetheless powerful negative undercurrents that influence young males in their struggle to develop an identity within the context of *otherness* is the force of history and politics. Political movements, past and present, are the more active, and far from benign, influences on a young male's experience of his masculinity and sense of identity. In the past, homosexuals have been annihilated, as occurred during the Nazi regime (Plummer, 1999), or ostracised and guarded against, as occurred during the witch-hunt of homosexuals and communists by Senator McCarthy in the United States (Kimmel, 1996). To understand homosexuality—in the past and in the present—is to understand a social experience of rejection, isolation, control, and repression (Frosh, 1997; Sullivan, 1995). As Foucault (1978) notes, “sex [and sexuality] is placed by power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden ...: sex [and sexuality] is to be deciphered on the basis of its relation to law ... power acts by laying down the rule: power's hold on sex is maintained through language, or rather through the acts of discourse that creates, from the very fact that it is articulated, a rule of law” (p. 83).

Male sex work or prostitution can only be considered within this broader context of masculinity, homosexuality, the regulation of sex, power and social control, fear of *otherness*, and the consequences of all these historical and present-day social forces that impact greatly on the thinking and experience of young males. It is a *background* discourse and experience that is infused into the psyche of the young male who experiences marginalisation. This is further complicated by a burgeoning awareness of his own *otherness* that is far from socially acceptable.

### **Social and work contexts**

Recent sociological literature moves beyond the focus on negative personal and environmental issues and highlights that young males engaged in sex work are not simply victims within their environment but also make choices (Minichiello et al., 2001). These are often around the social and work context of the prostitution encounters (Browne & Minichiello, 1995, 1996b). This research focuses on the economic imperatives and the choices that result (Mariño,

Minichiello, & Disogra, 2003). In doing so, this new research highlights that not all sex workers are exploited, psychologically unstable, desperate or destitute (Leary & Minichiello, 2007; Scott, 2003a; West & de Villiers, 1993). This more recent research also focuses on the client characteristics of sex work encounters: their social class, age, and sexual identification (Crael, Slaymaker, Lyerla, & Sarkar, 2006; Minichiello, Mariño, Browne, Jamieson, & Peterson, 1999; Storer, 1999).

However, it must be said that even within this new framework of research, it is difficult to ignore the concurrence of both negative and positive experiences within sex work. These include experiences such as: limited education and poor income, previous experience of imprisonment, poor sex work conditions, high levels of mobility, and substance use (Belza et al., 2001; Browne & Minichiello, 1996a; Minichiello et al., 2001; Minichiello, Mariño, Khan, & Browne, 2003; Morse, Simon, Baus, Balson, & Osofsky, 1992; Pedersen & Hegna, 2003). Some research notes the social inequality experiences for and between male and female sex workers (Perkins & Bennett, 1985; Weinberg, Shaver, & Williams, 1999). Other researchers eschew more negative interpretations of the phenomenon of sex work altogether. Ignoring historical issues, they concentrate on economic imperatives and view male sex work as an economic enterprise (Davies & Feldman, 1997; Edlund & Korn, 2002; Zigman, 1999).

A final area that indicates both the perennial nature, and yet dynamism, of male sex work is the burgeoning use of the Internet. It is an altered context that explores a variety of themes. These include sex work elements such as the descriptive accounts of both workers and clients in sex work encounters (Koken, Parsons, Severino, & Bimbi, 2005) and the worker's reasons for involvement in sex work (Uy, Parsons, Bimbi, Koken, & Halkitis, 2004). The same body of research also examines issues such as sexual compulsivity and risk behaviour (Parsons et al., 2001) and the stigma associated with sex work (Koken, Bimbi, Parsons, & Halkitis, 2004). It is a research direction that could not have been imagined 30 years ago. This is a particularly notable area of investigation because it captures themes covered in early research, such as sexual abuse

(Parsons, Bimbi, Koken, & Halkitis, 2005), while also exploring the phenomenon within an entirely new format (Parsons et al., 2005).

### **A resurgent interest in adolescents**

As previously indicated, the research literature and the common understanding of marginalised adolescents and young adults have both developed over the last three decades. Our understanding has moved from a situation where “runaway” young males were seen as “boy adventurers” to a position where legislators in New York State enacted the *Runaway and Homeless Youth Act* in 1978 (Staller, 2003). This was a public recognition that the boy adventurer status was a simplification of a complex reality that inevitably involved male prostitution. It was not until 10 years later that a similar process was enacted within the Australian context and an extensive public inquiry was held into homelessness in Australia (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1989; O’Connor, 1989).

Since that time, there has been a burgeoning interest in the broad experience of marginalised adolescents and research has accompanied that interest. The focus has been on the experiences that make for marginalisation and poor health outcomes. Within this research, there has been an inevitable mention of male prostitution or sex work as associated with, or even a consequence of, other experiences that make prostitution or sex work a necessity. By way of example, Rotheram-Borus and her colleagues have long focussed on suicidality and runaway youth (Leslie, Stein, & Rotheram-Borus, 2002; Rotheram-Borus, 1993). They have also focussed on the sexual behaviours of minority youth (Rotheram-Borus, Meyer-Bahlburg, Rosario et al., 1992) and the risks and negative health outcomes within the general youth population (Rotheram-Borus, Meyer-Bahlburg, Koopman et al., 1992). Finally, they have focussed on the multiple forms of risk-taking behaviour of runaway youth (Rotheram-Borus, Mahler, Koopman, & Langabeer, 1996), including the use of illicit and harmful substances (Rotheram-Borus et al., 1994). This body of research collectively notes an increase in the incidence of male prostitution

among homeless youth as does other research. Edwards, Iritani and Hallfors (2006) use the *Add Health* data collection (Harris et al., 2003) that consists of a nationally representative sample of adolescents in the United States. The study targeted school age adolescents and interviewed them in two waves. They were interviewed first while in school (wave I). Second, they were interviewed in home-based interviews (wave II). The study by Edwards et al. (2003), using the same data set, consisted of the adolescents who provided valid responses in both waves (N=13,294). In the study, 3.5 per cent of the sample had exchanged sex for money or drugs, two thirds of them were boys. A key result in the study by Edwards et al. (2003) was that there was a strong correlation between substance use—especially injecting drug use—and involvement in sex work or prostitution. It is a striking conclusion that is reflected in other research already mentioned.

A final area of research interest in respect to adolescents over the last few decades has been the experiences of gay, lesbian and bisexual adolescents. Again, the literature is mixed, with some researchers identifying problems—such as harassment and abuse—being experienced by gay, lesbian and bisexual youth (Hillier et al., 1998; Hillier, Turner, & Mitchell, 2005). These problems include experiences such as substance use, delinquency and unprotected sex (Rotheram-Borus, Rosario, Van Rossem, Reid, & Gillis, 1995). Other research reaffirms that there is no necessary connection between sexual identity and “pathology and problematic behavior” such as “drug abuse, suicide, prostitution or HIV infection” (Hillier & Harrison, 2004; Savin-Williams, 2001a, p. 5). However, Savin-Williams (1994) had previously considered the “causal link” between verbal and physical harassment in the lives of gay, lesbian and bisexual youth. He noted “negative outcomes” such as “school-related problems, substance abuse, criminal activity, prostitution, running away from home, and suicide” (p. 267).

Having said that, there is significant research on these social and behavioural issues where prostitution is not mentioned. This points to the fact that the presence of risk does not automatically equate with involvement in male sex work (e.g., Armstrong & Manion, 2006; Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006; Huba et al., 2000; Rotheram-Borus et al., 2001; Savin-Williams,

2001b). With little doubt, the one dominating theme in both the resurgent interest in adolescence and the change in language, understanding, and research in male prostitution or sex work has been the urgent interest in *HIV/AIDS and public health* and their association with male sex work and prostitution.

### **HIV/AIDS and public health**

From the early 1990s and onwards, the tenor of research and literature changed in response to the AIDS crisis. The previous concentration on negative psychosocial factors, and the newer framing of sex work as contextualised and relational, took on a *here and now* urgency rather than an historical perspective. Within the context of HIV/AIDS, the focus was on understanding the sexual and other behaviour of male sex workers (Bloor, McKeganey, & Barnard, 1990; Parsons et al., 2001) and of the consideration of public health issues.

Rather than pathologising the past psychosocial experience of the young male engaged in sex work, the emphasis shifted to an awareness of *male sex workers* (MSW) as a “core group of disease transmitters” (Leuridan, Wouters, Stalpaert, & Van Damme, 2005, p. 54; cf. Simon, Morse, Osofsky, & Balson, 1994). This research dealt with questions of how best to engage, inform, monitor and retain health in the face of HIV and other STIs (Rosario, Meyer-Bahlburg, Hunter, & Gwadz, 1999; Rotheram-Borus, Meyer-Bahlburg, Rosario et al., 1992). While the theme of prostitution still appeared in research literature on young people (Solorio, Swendeman, & Rotheram-Borus, 2003), HIV was and remains the dominant focal point for the research. The palpable concern is to understand sex work practices in the age of HIV and AIDS (Rhodes, Singer, Bourgois, Friedman, & Strathdee, 2005) on the basis that those engaged in prostitution are at the highest risk of contracting HIV (Boles & Elifson, 1994; Knowles, 1998; McCamish et al., 2000). The research in this area varies greatly with some more recent studies indicating that, in general, a safer sex work approach is being practiced by male sex workers (Minichiello et al., 2000; Parker, 2006).

A wide variety of themes have developed in the literature in relation to HIV and sex work. These include the factors (e.g., inability to insist on safe sex) that predispose to HIV infection (McKeganey, Barnard, & Bloor, 1990; Pleak & Meyer-Bahlburg, 1990). The literature continues to examine the concurrence of homelessness, other prior negative experiences, and HIV (Haley et al., 2004; Lambert et al., 2005; Markos, Wade, & Walzman, 1994; Rotheram-Borus, Koopman, & Ehrhardt, 1991; Rotheram-Borus, Koopman, Haignere, & Davies, 1991; Stephens et al., 2000; Walters, 1999). More recent Australian research examines the social context, internal mediating factors, and worker/client interactions in sex work, and their impact on safe sex (Minichiello, Mariño, Browne, & Jamieson, 1998). Men who have sex with men but who have female partners have also been considered. This research considers the mediating role of injecting substance use in relation to safe sex and STIs (O'Connell et al., 2004).

A long-standing area of research interest has been that of tourism and sex work (Cohen, 1988; Kunawararak, Beyrer, & Natpratan, 1995). While economic hardship appears in the literature on tourism, it also appears in the research on trans-national migration, sex work and HIV (Belza et al., 2001; Kelly et al., 2001). Another long-standing area of research interest in the area of sex work is that of identity development and risk of HIV (Boles & Elifson, 1994; de Graaf, Vanwesenbeeck, van Zessen, Straver, & Visser, 1994).

Since the advent of HIV and AIDS, access to health care has been a significant issue of concern. Variable access to health services by those engaged in male sex work is viewed as a major issue of concern in the prevention of STIs including HIV (Disogra, Mariño, & Minichiello, 2005). This is a more prevalent issue in poorer countries and communities (Lambert et al., 2005). The place of education, and brief interventions, in behaviour change and AIDS prevention has also been considered (Ford, Wirawan, & Fajans, 1995; Sullivan, 1996; Williams, Bowen, Timpson, Ross, & Atkinson, 2006; Ziersch, Gaffney, & Tomlinson, 2000). Again, substance use is seen to impact on safe sex practices and the transmission of HIV and other STIs (Aral, St. Lawrence, Dyatlov, & Kozlov, 2005; de Graaf, Vanwesenbeeck, & van Zessen, 1995; DeMatteo et al., 1999;

Haley et al., 2004; He, Wong, Huang, Thompson, & Fu, 2007; Parsons & Halkitis, 2002; Solorio et al., 2003; Weber et al., 2001).

One significant and relatively new theme that has emerged in the literature on male sex work is that of the risks associated with a split mentality regarding safe sex practices (Estcourt et al., 2000; Haley et al., 2004; McCamish et al., 2000; Sethi et al., 2006; Weinberg, Worth, & Williams, 2001). The *yes at work; no at home* phenomenon is of major concern, particularly within a context where serial monogamy is a reality. Knowledge, awareness of risk, and its connection to the broader social context of the person, is a significant issue in male sex work (Mariño et al., 2003).

Thus, sex work is viewed as a primary vector for transmission of HIV to other population groups (Morse, Simon, Osofsky, Balson, & Gaumer, 1991; Pisani et al., 2004) or not (Parker, 2006). Some research indicates that rather than sex work being the risk factor, street-life and living rough is the real and practical vector for transmission to other population groups (Lambert et al., 2005).

Throughout the literature, criminality in its various forms arises as a major concern and is connected with HIV transmission (Shakarishvili et al., 2005). However, social control, law enforcement, and stigmatisation are also seen as negative influences on AIDS prevention (Lewis, Maticka-Tyndale, Shaver, & Schramm, 2005; Mutchler, 2004; Scott, 2003b). Harm reduction and minimisation strategies are considered (Cohan et al., 2006; Rekart, 2005; van Beek, 1994), particularly for population groups at risk of HIV because of a lack of access to health care and education (Dandona et al., 2006; Shakarishvili et al., 2005). Population mobility is a key feature in the spread of HIV for those engaged in male sex work (Steen et al., 2006), particularly in developing countries and the new frontiers of HIV (Go et al., 2006; He et al., 2007; Lambert et al., 2005; Pisani et al., 2004; Shakarishvili et al., 2005).

## Summary comments on modern research directions

There is an obvious interrelatedness among the themes in this research review. Early research dealt with male prostitution as deviance and therefore as a threat to social order and coherence; and yet, during the early period, alternative visions of the person within the phenomenon were beginning to appear. The concepts of *work* and *industry* became a vehicle whereby those engaged in sex work could be viewed in a non-pathologising way. From there, an interest in the context and constituent elements of sex work began to emerge. These continue to be core themes in the research.

HIV and AIDS have radically changed the research landscape. Since 1984, the research on male prostitution or sex work has gained a new orientation: that of understanding behaviour, early intervention and prevention. The research also focuses on particular groups of sex workers, and particular communities where sex workers are found, where transmission of the virus is considered most likely. Within the context of HIV and AIDS, it is difficult to move away from a pathologising approach. Risks are evident, behaviour is influenced by factors that can mediate poor health outcomes, consequences are significant, and whole population groups, and even nations, can be compromised. Notwithstanding this new form of potentially pathologising language, newer research attempts to recognise that while there are risks, positive interventions can occur and the avoidance of health compromising outcomes can be achieved. The more positive frames of reference have also arisen because there is recognition that within an environment where negative outcomes are feared, *adaptation in the face of adversity* is also evident. It is to the subject of *resilience* that I now turn in this final section of the literature review.

## A different frame of reference

There is considerable research around issues of resilience in adolescence (Kaplan, 1999; Rutter, 1985; Rutter, 1987; Rutter, 1993). While there is not always agreement regarding how

resilience develops and functions (Glantz & Sloboda, 1999), there are a significant number of studies that support the notion that certain factors and contexts, particularly significant peer and family relationships, can protect young people in the face of adversity (Lynskey & Fergusson, 1997; Resnick et al., 1997). It is useful at this stage of the literature review to examine how a consideration of vulnerability and resilience literature may impact on my consideration of the experience of young males engaged in SMSW.

### **Vulnerability**

Vulnerability has been described as “an interactive process between the social contexts in which a young person lives and a set of underlying factors that, when present, place the young person *at risk* for negative outcomes” (Blum, McNeely, & Nonnemaker, 2002, p. 28). Adolescents and young adults who experience marginalisation—of whatever kind—are often viewed as vulnerable in their world and therefore at risk of negative personal health and social outcomes (Nightingale & Fischhoff, 2002). They are vulnerable because of the *interactive process* between *social context* and *underlying negative personal factors*. This reality is certainly borne out in this present research, which sheds light on vulnerability in the lives of those engaged in SMSW. Social and financial poverty and disadvantage (Blum et al., 2000; Garmezy, 1991) and disconnection from family of origin (Mack, 2001; Slesnick & Meade, 2001) are crucial factors in heightening vulnerability in a person’s life. Family and local community are the environments where vulnerability is evident in its earliest stages. Where this is followed by disconnection from other adult carers and community support structures, a fragmentation in the person can manifest itself in homelessness and the uncensored access to unpredictable social and personal influences (Rotheram-Borus, 1993; Rotheram-Borus, Meyer-Bahlburg, Koopman et al., 1992). An example of this is where the person is isolated within, or even estranged from, the education system (Borowsky & Resnick, 1998).

Alongside homelessness, there are other influences that can cause fragmentation. These may include short term or ongoing events such as substance use (Song, Safaean, Strathdee, Vlahov, & Celentano, 2000), sexual risk-taking and the experience of STIs (Paul et al., 2001), and prostitution (Yates, MacKenzie, Pennbridge, & Swofford, 1991). The combination of fragmentation and exposure may mark the beginning of a gradual or even rapid psychosocial unravelling, largely because of the level and consistency of exposure to severe psychosocial stressors such as violence (Zima et al., 1999).

Early theorising on fragmentation and exposure to stressors was couched within the framework of developmental psychopathology, which was defined by Sroufe and Rutter (1984) as “the study of the origins and course of individual patterns of behavioral maladaptation, whatever the age of onset, whatever the causes, whatever the transformations in behavioral manifestation, and however complex the course of the developmental pattern may be” (p. 18). Much of the early child development research was focussed on the development and progress of both physical and psychological pathology, a focus that remains evident today. However, it is important to note that even within a context of fragmentation and exposure to stressor, and of the development of pathological trends, where vulnerability may well be a starting point, it is not always the dominant experience. This realisation sparked a new line of inquiry focussing on how it is that children and adolescents survive in the face of adversity (Rutter, 1985) — a point I shall return to in the next section of this discussion. In the context of the present study, it has been imperative to discover how it is that some young males engaged in SMSW survive (and even flourish) while others do not.

At a level beyond the physical manifestations, such as homelessness and the other external experiences just mentioned, limited family and other support can also produce internal or psychological sequelae such as intense isolation and anxiety. This raises the prospect of depression that can manifest later as chronic health problems (Berdahl, Hoyt, & Whitbeck, 2005; Compas & Hammen, 1996; Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpela, Rantanen, & Laippala, 2001). Where neglect

switches to abuse (be it physical, sexual or emotional) the impact can be physiological as well as psychological, affecting “the development of certain vulnerable brain regions ... resulting in psychiatric sequelae” (Teicher, Samson, Polcari, & McGreenery, 2006, p. 997). Exposure to verbal aggression can result in the development of poor interpersonal skills (Teicher et al., 2006). This can then result in negative social behaviour such as bullying (Sourander, Helstelä, Helenius, & Piha, 2000), and other forms of aggression (Hale III, Van Der Valk, Engels, & Meeus, 2005).

Suicidal ideation and attempts are also evident in the adolescent and young adult population who experience high levels of marginalisation within the family, such as when abuse occurs (Evans, Hawton, & Rodham, 2005). Marginalisation can also be evident at a more macro level when there is a more generalised isolation from peers and services within a local community (Armstrong & Manion, 2006). The risk associated with a generalised isolation is exacerbated by the paradox that those most *at risk* of harm do not always gain access to (Kodjo, Auinger, & Ryan, 2002), or choose not to access, services (Caldwell, Jorm, & Dear, 2004). What is of concern in the consideration of vulnerability within individuals, families, groups and communities is that there is evidence of the combination of multiple points of adversity creating a complicated form of vulnerability (Meyerson, Long, Miranda, & Marx, 2002). Just as significant is the mounting evidence that supports the existence of an intergenerational transfer of risk and vulnerability (Serbin & Karp, 2004; Smith & Farrington, 2004; Tremblay et al., 2004).

While consideration is given to issues of vulnerability and the movement of this within individuals, groups, and across generations, it is imperative to provide some understanding of the concept and processes of adaptability, protective factors and the advent of resilience. It is important to understand how it develops, or is enhanced, within individuals, families and other groupings within a given social environment. Within that consideration, it is also imperative to examine the place of connectivity or connectedness as a pathway through which resilience is discovered and confirmed.

## Resilience and connectivity

As psychology began to develop as a science in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was Freud who noted the human capacity to overcome adversity (Freud, 1928). Within the American context, Murphy (1962) bemoaned the negative focus on research in children, noting that “it is something of a paradox that a nation which has exulted in its rapid expansion and its scientific-technological achievements should have developed in its studies of childhood so vast a ‘problem’ literature” (p. 2).

Since the early 1980s, the literature on adolescence and young adults has been replete with research and theorising, and the consideration of interventions around concepts of vulnerability, risk and resilience (Beardslee, 1989; Brooks, 1994; Cowen, Wyman, & Work, 1996; Glantz & Sloboda, 1999; Lightsey, 2006; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000a; Lynskey & Fergusson, 1997; Masten, Best, & Garnezy, 1990; Masten & O’Connor, 1989; Ong, Bergeman, Bisconti, & Wallace, 2006; Raphael, 1993; Resnick et al., 1997; Rutter, 1985; Rutter, 1987; Rutter, 1993, 1999). Resilience has been described as “a class of phenomena characterized by patterns of positive adaptation in the context of significant adversity or risk” (Masten & Reed, 2002, p. 75). It has also been described as the presence of “wellness in addition to the absence of dysfunction” (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000b, p. 574). This adaptation in the face of adversity is far from a linear process. As Blum (2002) has indicated, an outcome of resilience is the result of an “interactive process between context and harm-inducing/harm-minimizing factors”. As such, it is “not a trait or characteristic that some have and others do not; rather, it represents an interaction between the individual and the environment” (p. 29; see also, Garnezy, 1991). Of necessity, it is a dynamic and unpredictable process. Some people experience great adversity and survive and flourish while others appear to suffer less adversity and yet struggle to survive.

Being resilient does not mean invulnerability to assault or invincibility in the face of adversity. Rather, it means: (a) developing and maintaining an ability to recover after psychosocial insult, and (b) possessing the equally significant ability to maintain a capacity for adaptation in the

face of adversity. Thus, it is about resistance to threat rather than the absence or avoidance of threat or adversity (Blum et al., 2002). Resilience is the transient and ever evolving end point of a complex developmental process with biological *and* environmental origins and ongoing influences, where protective factors necessarily operate in different ways over a person's lifespan (Rutter, 1993). It is therefore a process unique to each person and is neither static nor common.

Some examples of the protective factors that are said to enhance resilience in life are: stable care; problem solving abilities; attractiveness to peers and adults; manifest competence and perceived efficacy; identification with competent role models; planfulness and aspiration (Garmezy, 1996). Other researchers describe these protective factors across three distinct areas (Luthar et al., 2000a): personal characteristics, such as belief in a higher power (Cotton, Larkin, Hoopes, Cromer, & Rosenthal, 2005); family characteristics, such as parenting and nurturing (Gest, Neemann, Hubbard, Masten, & Tellegen, 1993); and the social environment into which the person is immersed and his engagement with that environment (Blum et al., 2002; Marsh, Clinkinbeard, Thomas, & Evans, 2007). While being distinct, these protective factors are not discrete; they interact in a dynamic and unpredictable fashion that results in variable and developing levels of vulnerability and resilience (Kaplan, 1999).

Kumpfer (1999) outlines a complex *resilience framework* that further explores the interaction of elements within a given bio-psycho-social environment: external stressors or challenges; the environmental context; the transactional process that occurs between person and environment; the person's cognitive, spiritual, social, physical and emotional skills; and the adaptive processes that are learnt or developed in the face of developing challenges. These elements are determinative of the psychosocial and health outcomes for the person, both in positive and negative ways. Beyond the clear understanding that personal, familial and environmental protective factors are crucial in the development of resilience, it is imperative to understand and focus on the mediating experiences that make for resilience: in other words, to understand the interactions of the various elements in the development of resilience.

The literature on resilience focuses on *capacity-building* as an outcome of the enhancement of key protective factors (Borowsky, Ireland, & Resnick, 2001; Kumpfer, 1999; Masten, 1999; Masten & O'Connor, 1989; Pless & Stein, 1996; Resnick et al., 1997; Rutter, 1985; Rutter, 1987; Rutter, 1993). Some of these approaches are well researched and are viewed as efficacious in assisting adolescents and young adults to develop positively adaptive responses. Key examples are: strengthening family connectedness (Brennan, 1993; Gest et al., 1993; Masten et al., 1999; Pharris, Resnick, & Blum, 1997); delaying independence and avoiding premature sexualisation (Irwin, Burg, & Cart, 2002; O'Donnell, O'Donnell, & Stueve, 2001; Paul, Fitzjohn, Eberhart-Phillips, Herbison, & Dickson, 2000; Resnick et al., 1997; Rose et al., 2005). Other core examples are: enhancing access to and positive participation in education (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 1998; Gottlieb, Still, & Newby-Clark, 2007; Libbey, Ireland, & Resnick, 2002); avoidance of substance use and other negative behaviours (DuRant, Smith, Kreiter, & Krowchuk, 1999); providing access to a non-prejudicial educational and social environment (Blum & Ellen, 2002; Savin-Williams, 1994); and keeping up in education (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Masten et al., 1999). The presence of other caring adults is regarded as a significant and positive intervention (Sipe, 2002). Involvement in religious practices, the development of a sense of religious identity, and the strengthening of a sense of spirituality are also regarded as significant (Cotton et al., 2005; Kendler et al., 2003; Resnick et al., 1997). Positive and open communication with parents and adult carers can facilitate resilience (Rose et al., 2005). The same may be said for peer-relationships. Gottlieb, Still and Newby-Clark (2007) note that positive involvement with peers is associated with growth. These connections aid in the development of self-understanding and give meaning to life. In more recent research, there is evidence to suggest that "under intensely stressful conditions, positive emotions may provide an important psychological time-out, sustain continued coping efforts, and restore vital resources that have been depleted by stress" (Ong, Bergeman et al., 2006, p. 743).

A critical point in the resilience literature is that “positive outcomes or successful life adaptation in specific development tasks ... are supportive of later positive adaptation in specific developmental tasks culminating in a higher likelihood of reaching a global designation in adulthood as a resilient child and adult” (Kumpfer, 1999, p. 184). In essence, any “positive outcome suggesting resilience is ... predictive of later resilience reintegration after disruption or stress” (Kumpfer, 1999, p. 184).

One of the common features in much of the research already cited is the presence of a psychosocial vehicle that carries, or mediates, the development of resilience as a positive outcome. Bell (2001) makes reference to “rebuilding the village” as the way to encourage young people to “attract and use support” (p. 375). Markward, McMillan and Markward (2003) focus on the role that social support systems have in helping young people to develop social capital, which is an essential aspect of belonging and surviving. Ong, Phinney and Dennis (2006) also explore the role that family and culture have in positively modifying the negative effects of socioeconomic disadvantage. If the theorising work by Kumpfer (1999) and others, and the research by Ong (2006) and his colleagues, are all heading in the right direction, then relationships and connectivity are crucial as protective factors, and central in the development of resilience.

There is a common belief that marginalised adolescents and young adults relate only to a “homogeneous collections of deviant-peer relationships with few ties to home and family” (Johnson et al., 2005, p. 246). Far from that being the case, Johnson and his colleagues found in their research that “the networks of runaway and homeless adolescents are considerably heterogeneous, comprised of relationships from home and the street as well as family and non-related adults” (p. 246). Many and varied types of relationships hold the potential to be vehicles for those protective factors, social capital, and the positive emotions and alleviate stress and allow for the maintenance of resilience (La Greca & Harrison, 2005).

The literature on resilience has changed the way we think about child and adolescent development, the focus shifting from an early and almost absolute focus on individual maladaptation to a broader focus on understanding and promoting the pathways towards positive adaptation among *at risk* groups within the population (Robinson, 2000).

### **Concluding remarks about the literature review**

The focus of this review of the literature has been on outlining the current research base relating to male sex work in general, but specifically relating to male sex work that has its origins and practice on the streets of cities and towns. The literature on male sex work—and in particular, street-based sex work—remains limited. The portrayal provided by Haley et al. (2004) that those who engage in street-based sex work have limited education, limited social support, no employment, and are involved in “begging, stealing, selling drugs, or trading sex in order to survive” (p. 526) paints a constraining picture of both the person and the phenomenon. While elements—and perhaps all elements—of this picture have a degree of accuracy, the major question is whether there is another narrative that provides a richer and more fine-grained understanding of the person within the phenomenon of street-based male sex work. This is the point of origin for the current research.

From this brief review of the salient literature, it is clear that there is extensive research around a number of areas in relation to male prostitution or sex work: types and hierarchies of MSWs; causation and contributing factors focussing on the negative personal and environmental factors; the psychological profile and psychodynamics of workers and working; HIV and AIDS; work and career paths; deviance; substance use; and, economic disadvantage and its place in the production of negative health outcomes. In their review of issues and directions in sex work research, Benoit and Shaver (2006) note several areas where there are gaps in our understanding: “youth in the sex industry”; “new migrants” and “sex slavery”; pathways through sex work;

Aboriginal workers and their experience of health and wellbeing; and, the external and “felt” experience and outcomes of stigma (pp. 245-246).

The area that receives least attention in the literature is that of the *relational aspects* of this often hidden social experience (Vanwesenbeeck, 2001). This is a serious missing link within the research, since relationships are said to be the environment where a capacity for adaptation in the face of adversity arises within the lives of all people, including those who are marginalised. As Benoit and Shaver (2006) note about the extant literature, “they still often appear as one-dimensional, rather than as people whose work represents only one part of their multi-faceted lives” (p. 246). To examine the pathology and potential harm that can arise through substance use, poverty, and HIV is but one aspect of an increasingly complex narrative regarding male sex work. To examine only their street-based work practices is, in some respects, to ignore the person within the work. The reality is that there is far more than simply sex work within this complex experience. Not all those who live on the street, remain on the street. A lack of education does not mean a permanent loss of opportunity. Sexual abuse does not necessitate permanent victimisation. Sex work relationships are not the only relationships, and even those relationships are not all framed in negative tones. In the case of young males engaged in street-based sex work, there is life away from *The Wall*. So, what is that life, and what are the alternative narratives around adversity, adaptation and resilience? While there is limited and recent research that deals with some of these concerns (e.g., Leichtentritt & Arad, 2005), it remains a critical area with limited conceptual exploration and density.

In summary, it appears that a key area of SMSW that has yet to be fully explored is that of relationships. These occur across all areas and times in the life of the person engaged in SMSW. The reality is that as a researcher, and as a counsellor, I form a part of the relational matrix that gives substance, and hopefully sustenance, to their lives. Therefore, in order to explore this critical facet in the lives of those engaged in SMSW, careful consideration must be given, not just to the *method* of exploration, but also to the *theory* underpinning that method, since

in developing a theory and method for research, I must be cognisant of the reality that I have long been *embedded within the landscape of this research*. This reality impacts on the participants, the research, and the researcher. It is to a careful examination of *theory* and *method* that I now turn.

# Chapter 3

## LOCATING THE RESEARCH TRADITION AND THE METHODOLOGY

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### Introduction

This chapter is divided into six major parts and outlines and describes the method and design used within this research project. The first part briefly locates this researcher within a research tradition, that of qualitative interpretive (hermeneutic) inquiry (Gadamer, 1989; Martin & Sugarman, 2001; Packer & Addison, 1989; Taylor, 1985). In the light of both my understanding of the research tradition in which I am located and the particular research in which I am engaged, the second part of the chapter explores the place of the researcher within the research, giving flesh and bone to the hermeneutic project embedded in this research. The third part explores the technical aspects of the research methodology for this project: *grounded theory*. While there are common understandings in respect of grounded theory between all of the primary theorists, there are, nonetheless, significant and key arguments, refinements and developments that have occurred since the original position of Glaser and Strauss was outlined in their seminal work (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). At the end of this consideration, I locate my own use of grounded theory, which is strongly influenced by hermeneutics. The fourth part will

outline the research design of the study, including sampling, the interviews and text analysis. The fifth part deals with evaluation in qualitative research. The sixth and final part explores the ethical issues associated with this research project.

### **Locating the research tradition**

The question of *why qualitative inquiry* has been chosen as a research paradigm for this project emerges because of the type of phenomenon under investigation. It also emerges as a critical methodological issue because of the questions I have as a counselling practitioner in respect of the participants in the study. As Morrow (2007) has indicated, counsellors seek research methods that are “congruent with paradigms and methods more closely related to practice” (p. 209). The current research is underpinned by a different set of taken-for-granted assumptions that revolve around an alternative way of understanding human experience.

The phenomenon that I have considered in the research project is a complex social psychological reality. The research is an examination of the “relationships between people and groups of people” (Howitt, 1989, p. 169) in a particular social setting. The research is about understanding the thoughts and feelings, desires and actions of those males who engage in street-based sex work. This study is about exploring “the depth and complexity of [their] human experience” (Morrow, 2007, p. 209). What this research endeavours to understand is the *meaning* embedded within their complex experience. However, understanding behaviour is itself a complex endeavour. As Menzel (1978) has indicated, “the meaning of a piece of behaviour ... is often far from obvious; even an eyewitness who ‘sees’ a given act performed may be wrong” (p. 142). If I observe a young male engaging in sex work at *The Wall*, what am I to make of this reality? If I assume that his behaviour is simply the act of selling sex, I may misunderstand the intentions and experience of the young male and hence “make nonsense out of any subsequent attempts to explain the occurrence of the acts” (p. 142).

The questions that emerge in this research cannot easily be addressed using a methodology that has reductionist tendencies. The meaning of action within human experience is irreducible to simple and quantifiable formulae. A critical element of the research is the endeavour to open up, and acquire, an in-depth understanding of a hidden phenomenon involving emotions, internal dialogues and complex human relationships and interactions. Hence, rather than adopting a *causal-explanatory* form of inquiry that focuses on dependent and independent variables, operational definitions, causal connections and quantitative analysis (Erklären), the current research focuses on gaining an *understanding* of the meanings of the phenomenon (Verstehen). It is a form of inquiry that explores the “fullness of life and encompasses lived human experience” (Woolfolk, Sass, & Messer, 1988, p. 8). This realisation “differentiates the methods of understanding human action from those of understanding natural events” (Woolfolk et al., 1988, p. 8). Further, both the phenomenon and the participants easily retreat in silence when the form of inquiry is not attuned to their needs. A fundamental need of the participants is to tell their story, and to have their story heard, and this is not easily quantified. The analysis of rich interview text is therefore the most appropriate method for achieving that in-depth understanding and for understanding the meaning embedded within complex experience. Thus, as Morrow (2007) indicates, “using language as a tool, the researcher is able to plumb the depths of this experience to glean meanings that are not otherwise observable and that cannot be gathered using survey or other data-gathering strategies” (p. 211).

### **The significance of context to knowing and understanding meaning**

Quantitative research involves a process whereby the researcher “reduces material to manageable proportions ... abstracting certain types of information from it” (Parker, 1994, p. 1). Objectification is a key marker of a quantitative inquiry. Reality is viewed as something that can be mapped out and measured through empirical observation (Richardson, Rogers, & McCarroll, 1998). In a positivist way of thinking, the intelligibility of any phenomenon “is assumed from the

start and does not need a context to provide it” (Taylor, 1993, p. 329). In respect of the current research, this is where the adoption of quantitative inquiry is problematic as the “process of reduction and abstraction ... will eventually reach a point where the context completely disappears” (Parker, 1994, p. 1). Street-based sex work is what I seek to make more intelligible and this phenomenon is made up of meaning-laden events. Discovering the embedded meaning within experience is where this intelligibility is to be found and meaning is contextual. Qualitative inquiry is based on the interpretive tradition and “relies on knowledge from the inside”. It is a research tradition and cluster of methods that begin “with and develop analyses from the point of view of the experiencing person” (Charmaz, 1995, p. 30). Within that understanding of research, knowing and understanding the meaning within experience is highly contextual.

Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), a professor of rhetoric at the University of Naples, gives an early consideration of what it means to know and understand the meaning embedded within experience. Beyond understanding that which *I create* and that which *I observe* (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000), there is another form of knowing and understanding. It is an understanding of self and others gained by being able to imaginatively reconstruct experience. This endeavour is “not a static network of eternal, universal, clear truths, either Platonic or Cartesian, but a social process” (Berlin, 1979, p. 113) that is co-created.

According to Berlin, this form of understanding and intelligibility is a knowing from the inside of the person’s experience, for example, “what it is to be poor, to fight for a cause, to belong to a nation, to join or abandon a church or a party, to feel nostalgia, terror, the omnipresence of a god, to understand a gesture, a work of art, a joke, a man’s character, that one is transformed or lying to oneself” (Berlin, 1979, p. 116). However, what is critical here is that we know and understand these things not just from our own action, merit or experience. We know them because they emerge from the intertwining of lives. For Shotter (1993), this way of knowing is “embodied in the conversational background to our lives” (p. 19). It is not a theoretical knowledge (“knowing-that”), nor is it the practical type of knowledge as a craft (“knowing-

how’). Rather, it is the kind of knowledge a person has *from within* a situation, a group, social institution, or society. It is “knowledge by ‘direct acquaintance’ with my ‘inner states’ or by sympathetic insight into those of others” (Berlin, 1979, p. 117).

A critical aspect of this way of knowing is that this capacity for conceiving *what it must be like* for others cannot come about at a distance, or in an objectified manner; nor can it be gained without the “suspension of the most deep-lying assumptions of the inquirer’s own civilisation” (Berlin, 1979, p. 117). We know and come to understand the experience of others through being subjectively involved, being aware of “deep-lying assumptions” and then suspending them so that the voice (the experience) of the other can emerge within the conversational context, whether it be “*from within* a situation, a group, social institution, or society” (Shotter, 1993, p. 19; original emphasis).

To know and understand the experience of those engaged in street-based sex work, my research must utilise a mode of inquiry that allows for the exploration of the meaning-laden events at the centre of their experience. The researcher is a part of the conversational process that leads to the discovery of the meaning embedded within the experience of those who work *The Wall*. Our understanding of their experience is co-created within a conversational context that involves the participant who has worked at *The Wall* and the researcher who seeks to understand. To further explicate the significance of context and the reality that knowledge is co-created between the participants and the researcher, some consideration will be given to Taylor’s notion of the *background*.

### **The *background* and interpretation**

All of the philosophers who have challenged a positivist understanding of knowledge, science and methodology—of disengaged agency—have some place in their thinking for the notion of the *background* as a core part of hermeneutic understanding. It is impossible to comprehend the notion of interpretation as central to understanding, without an appreciation of

the *background* (Martin & Sugarman, 2001). While Taylor (1985; 1993; 1995a; 1995b; 1995c) is a key exponent on the *background*, it was Heidegger and (the later) Wittgenstein who “helped to prize [sic] us loose from rationalism by making us appreciate the role of the *background*, in one sense of this widely used term” (Taylor, 1995b, p. 68; emphasis added).

For Taylor, the *background*, “is that of which I am not simply unaware (as I am unaware of what is now happening on the other side of the moon), because [the background] makes intelligible what I am uncontestably aware of” (Taylor, 1993, p. 325). In other words, the *background* is that aspect of my world that *exists* and is *present to me* but beyond my capacity to articulate—at least initially—either in terms of the content or the extent of its influence. Even though “I cannot be said to be explicitly or focally aware of it” it is *present*; it is in the *background* rather than in the foreground of my thinking and experience “because that status is already occupied by what it is making intelligible” (Taylor, 1993, p. 325).

The point here is that I may be unaware of that which is in the *background* but it is ever-formative in my perceptions, interpretation and understanding. It is that which is constantly helping me make sense of my life experience. Thus, I cannot say I do not know of it because it is *there* and it is *influential*. Because it is there and I am aware of its existence—at least in some inchoate manner—it is an influence on my understanding. I have what may be termed a *familiarity* with the *background*, and thus, “what I bring out to articulacy is what I ‘always knew’ as we might say, or what I had a ‘sense’ of, even if I didn’t ‘know’ it” (Taylor, 1993, p. 326). For Taylor, this is a powerful reconfiguring of the way we see the self and others, as “people can only be understood against the background of their (presumed) world” (1995a, p. 153). This perspective is not an added extra, a luxury to understanding but a central part of the self, of interpretive action and of understanding the human person.

The background against which I operate is always present and influential, and hence, understanding the *other* is always in a sense comparative. If I am to locate the experience of the *other*, I must also locate the researcher because “we make the other intelligible through our own

human understanding” (Taylor, 1995a, p. 150). Thus, we “only liberate the others and ‘let them be’ when we can identify and articulate a contrast between their understanding and ours, thereby ceasing in that respect just to read them through our home understanding, and allowing them to stand apart from it on their own” (Taylor, 1995a, p. 150).

It is a hermeneutic process of awareness and of interpretation. There is a continuous “dialectical tacking” between the part and the whole within the participant’s experience and within that of my own (Woolfolk et al., 1988, p. 7). If understanding is to be present through interpretation, it is a *double hermeneutic* that is taking place. It is not just an interpretive process of the experience of *the other*. It also involves the interpretation of my own experience as it interacts with *the other* (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000; Richardson & Woolfolk, 1994). It is a vision of understanding where the horizon of understanding of each person is at play; therefore, understanding “is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 306).

Hermeneutics takes a position of “holding fast to the insider’s perspective as the source from which all reflection ... ultimately originates” (Guignon, 1991, p. 96). This recognition “is seen not as a constraint ... but as an enabling condition that first gives us a window onto ourselves as agents in the world” (Guignon, 1991, p. 97). It is from this position that we continue to explore and give the best accounts we can of our real situation and that of others with whom we explore our humanness (Richardson & Woolfolk, 1994).

### **Locating the researcher**

In perhaps a most poignant way, this must be part of my research methodology: to identify the background that is ever present and influential; to retrieve and articulate it so its influence can be understood; and to resist ignoring or sidelining it under the pretext or even pretence that to ignore or sideline it is to disarm or silence it. Therefore, the next part of

establishing a methodology that allows for the emergence of the person within the phenomenon of SMSW is to take the notion of the *background* and to explore this *in vivo*, in other words, within the context of this research and with me as the researcher. In order to achieve that end, I present aspects of the psychological thinking that have influenced me throughout this work; and the human experience that has coloured the development of this research.

### **The researcher and the foreigner**

I have long held a passion for understanding how it is that resilience comes *to be* in adolescents who are marginalised—some may even say crippled—by their experience and by society. However, having made such an easy declaration about the origins of this current research, I must also add that I had no desire whatsoever, at the beginning of this investigation, to undertake qualitative research with young males engaged in street-based prostitution or sex work. If honesty prevails, I must also add that *fear*, and some *repugnance*, arose within me when I realised the research direction I was being encouraged to pursue. After five years of research and parallel reflexive action, I can identify these ever-unfolding thoughts and emotions as a *fear* of *otherness* and a mercurial *repugnance* for the *foreigner* — both within and without. These realisations were part of a gradual unfolding of my own complex internal dialogues and were strongly associated with personal history, but emerged with vigour and clarity when I began this project.

Developing an understanding of *otherness* or *foreignness* is the cornerstone of this research. However, as Kristeva (1991) indicates, “the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode” (p. 1). Thus, while a central aim of the research may be to approach an understanding of street-based sex work in all its richness, the place to begin is not with the *other* but with *self* and the foreigner within: that which I repel, fear and abhor. As Kristeva continues, “by recognizing him within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself”, and this is exactly the outcome I seek as a necessary precursor to understanding. I have a desire to understand those engaged in street-based sex work and their practices, not to detest

them or it. However, I clearly understand that “the foreigner comes in”—that is, difference becomes a stumbling block to understanding—“when the consciousness of my difference arises”. Conversely, the stumbling block of difference dissipates “when we all acknowledge ourselves as foreigners, unamenable to bonds and communities” (p. 1). Far from being a despairing thought, the realisation of fragility in relating to self and others is the pathway to accepting *otherness* and the development of bonds and communities.

Here is where a core challenge of this research is located: understanding the *other* or the *foreigner* is not a passive experience or a distanced encounter. It cannot be depersonalised or decontextualised. To explore the *other* or the *foreigner* in our world necessarily means to explore one’s own foreignness; to acknowledge and encounter “the hidden face of our identity” and “the space that wrecks our abode”, for it is the unattended *foreigner* within that blocks my capacity for openness to the *other* — emotionally, intellectually, and certainly in this research.

While this may seem a complex argument with which to begin a dissertation, the transparency and openness embedded in the earlier statements about me is indicative of an approach I have sought to infuse into the research as encapsulated in the encounters, the conversations, the analysis and the writing. This approach has become the guiding ideal of this research. For me to understand *otherness* in the world around me, it is imperative that I begin by approaching my own experience of *otherness*. It is my own sense of disconnection and alienation that requires reflexive action. It is an action whereby I seek to inhabit and explore this existential place, as a simultaneous action of the research, in order that I may be open to the full reality of *otherness* in the world and in those around me. In other words, if I want to hear the richness of the narratives of those engaged in street-based sex work, I need to unpack and understand my *fear* of *otherness* and my *repugnance* of the *foreigner* so that I can be free enough to be open to their reality. What follows is an attempt at identifying, and exploring briefly, that which is located in the *background*, and that seeks understanding, so that I may be open to *otherness*. It is a brief journey of

personal exploration of the stuff that blocks my attention to the experience of those with whom I seek to develop understanding — those engaged in street-based sex work.

### Defining the foreigner within

In December 1977, I began work as a Nurses' Aid at the Sacred Heart Hospice in Darlinghurst. It was a 12-month position taken up after I had left a Catholic seminary only the previous day. This palliative care unit is located adjacent to where young males engage in street-based sex work in Sydney. *The Wall*, as it is known, is a notorious place with a lengthy and complex history and geography: hospital precinct; location of endless death and dying; a former prison now a technical and art college, a church; a park inhabited by grieving visitors, nurses, destitute people and drug dealers; and a court house. It is noisy and cacophonous; it is central to my history and the locus of my research.

**Photo 1:** *The Wall*— Running diagonally from SW to NE across the photo, along the eastern side of the old gaol



Google Maps™ screenshot (c) Google Inc., reprinted with permission

My earliest memory of male prostitution was early in my year at the hospice. It was in the winter of 1978. It was 11pm, and after a torrid and emotional day of caring for dying people, I had finished work and walked out of the hospice and into Darlington Road along which *The Wall* runs. Dressed in a white nurse's uniform, I was mocked and jeered at by a scantily clad adolescent, not much younger than me, who had parked his buttocks on the bonnet of a car. It was a cold night with the wind howling down Darlington Road. He wore cut down jeans that barely contained what he was selling. He wore a sleeveless lumber jacket, with no shirt, and a pair of long ugg-boots strapped with leather thonging. It was a strange and yet alluring sight after a long day's work. He was cocky and sensual; I was tired and emotionally vulnerable. He appeared very at home in the darkness of the night and the constant exposure of the street; I was uncomfortable, confused, hesitant and shy. Perplexed by his apparent confidence, I could not help wondering why he was so at ease exposing his body to all and sundry. I was embarrassed, confused about who I was and what I wanted to be, and uneasy with my own sexual identity. He appeared at home; I was the stranger and foreigner. I have a journal note from that first encounter with street-based sex work. It notes the emotional details of that night: trepidation, fear, attraction, and the keen desire I had to know and understand him (Leary, 1978). I was 22; he was probably about the same age or a tad younger.

What I discovered at the beginning of this research was that the young man in the ugg-boots has remained an iconic part of my thinking about male sex work — a dimension of the *background* sense of things in this area. The discomfort and excitement of 28 years ago was awakened. Though occasionally thought about, I had never been able to articulate an understanding of my thoughts and feelings. I was imbued with a sense of strangeness and aware of a foreigner within me. My initial and strong reaction at the beginning of this research—fear and repugnance—had more to do with my own unresolved thoughts and emotions about intimacy and sex than about that particular young man on the car bonnet. Being seduced by a male sex worker was, at 22, an unfamiliar and confronting experience. It excited and challenged

my own need for intimacy: relief, pleasure, and relationship, all of which continued to press for exploration. At the beginning of this research, all of this was alive and active, perhaps hovering out of view in the *background* but *too close to home* for my liking. At the end of this research, I have discovered what it means to welcome and entertain the stranger and the foreigner: within and without.

While these thoughts and feelings remain somewhat unresolved, the hermeneutic process in which I have engaged—laying out and exploring the bias that led to a sense of foreignness and yet allure—has allowed for a sense of freedom in exploring with fresh vision the experience of young males who inhabit a place called *The Wall*. I do not pretend to “have it all together” or even more, that this is the only part of the *background* that has been alive and active. At the beginning of, and throughout, this research, I have attempted to explore that which prevents me from creating a place for *otherness*. One outcome of this approach is that it makes the methodology and the research design more dynamic. It also makes it more credible to the young men who were participants in this investigation.

### **Locating a research method**

At the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of their handbook on qualitative research, Denzin and Lincoln (2005b) begin by examining the lack of reflexivity and the abuse of marginalised populations that has occurred over the decades in qualitative research “in many if not all of its forms” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a, p. 1). Fundamentally, this has occurred when a traditional Western scientific approach to research and report writing has been applied to powerless or voiceless groups of people who are observed, and then written about, for the academy or a third party such as government. This occurred, for example, when white Western culture entered the non-white frontier and attempted to capture the essence of *otherness* and develop an

understanding (and perhaps explanation) of the *foreigner*. As a result, and as Smith (1999) has indicated,

The term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, 'research' is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary. When mentioned in many indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful. The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world's colonized peoples. (p. 1)

Although research practices associated with the colonial past have been partially dissolved in the West by the challenges of postmodernism, issues of power, paternalism and the abuse of intellectual authority over marginalised populations is potentially alive and well in modern day research practice whenever a distanced and disengaged approach is taken within research.

The mission of qualitative research has previously been described as "the analysis and understanding of the patterned conduct and social processes of society" (Vidich & Lyman, 1998, p.41). This early approach presupposed a capacity for "detachment" and the maintenance of "social and personal distance" as well as an ability to "analyse ... objectively" the subject matter under research (Vidich & Lyman, 1998, pp. 41-42). Such an approach misconceives what it means to know and understand; more recent formulations of qualitative research have a different perspective on the reality of academic pursuits and human relating and acknowledge that "the other can be understood only as a part of a relationship with the self" (Vidich & Lyman, 1998, p 42).

It is essential to have and maintain an awareness of the flawed history of research (both qualitative and quantitative). It is imperative to maintain a clear recognition of the alienation of marginalised populations by researchers. It is imperative to remember and be sensitive to the reality that marginalised individuals and groups are often sought after for research, and that they are also the least powerful. Thus, they are the ones most likely to be abused and trampled upon. Such an abuse of power can be avoided through a thoughtful cognisance of the psychology and the politics of doing research within a dialogical context of radical reflexivity. From the

philosophical perspective of hermeneutics and with a reflexive awareness of the *background* and of history emerges a radical social psychological perspective on research. This method aims to minimise the potential for abuse of power and the further marginalising of disenfranchised participants. It does this through engaging them in a qualitative form of inquiry located around conversation that co-creates an in-depth understanding of street-based male sex work.

### Statement of the research problem

The literature on street-based male sex work, while not extensive, has developed in complexity and breadth over three decades. In part, this has occurred because of the advent of HIV and AIDS and the common belief that sex work remains a key vector for the transmission of HIV and other communicable diseases. This population group is, therefore, a legitimate focus for research and public health attention, especially since recent research notes a reluctance in those engaged in sex work to speak of their experiences and practices (Cohan et al., 2006) — an important precursor of public and individual health intervention.

Those engaged in street-based male sex work have received even less intense research attention notwithstanding significant and recent evidence that their sexual and substance use practices are different to those engaged in non-street-based sex work (Leuridan et al., 2005). Increasingly, in Australia, young males who work *The Wall* are a difficult population group to find and approach, let alone research. The advent of mobile phones and limited use of internet technology by those engaged in SMSW, even where they are homeless, enables sex work to be highly dispersed and spatially mobile. While street-based sex work was once fixed to a particular geographic location in Sydney, a particular location is now simply (though not always) a starting point. The mobility of those engaged in street-based sex work increases the difficulty we have in locating, researching *with*, and assisting a highly marginalised group of young males.

This brief background information leads to two conclusions that set before us a core methodological problem. First, there is health-related urgency about research with this group of

young males. Second, gaining access to them, and to their thoughts, beliefs and emotions, is critical for them and others and yet difficult and demanding work. These conclusions impact on methodological directions and research design where the aim is to understand their experience and the way they relate to their world.

To achieve the primary aim of physical and narrative access, a methodology was required that would encourage involvement and allow the free revelation of their experience, beliefs, aspirations, fears and desires about themselves and others. Marginalisation and hiddenness are central aspects of the SMSW world. The methodology for this research must be cognisant of this reality. As a response to this understanding, an intense consideration of the landscape of the research is imperative: approaching participants, the place of any interview, the interview process, my availability. Special attention must be given to the ending of the researcher-participant contact/relationship.

In order to achieve a rich understanding across these various interrelated streams, qualitative research was chosen since it addresses “the meaning of verbal text in verbal rather than numerical terms” (Rennie, Watson, & Monteiro, 2002, p. 179), an approach more personal and patient than quantitative methods. This also allows for research goals and outcomes that are “more exploratory than confirmatory; more descriptive than explanatory; more interpretive than positivist” (Rennie et al., 2002, p. 179). Beyond this reasoning, associated as it is with gaining a rich and highly textured understanding of an under-researched phenomenon, qualitative research was chosen because of the increased capacity it *can* provide for a sensitised form of research with a marginalised group such as those engaged in street-based sex work (Melrose, 2002).

### **Preliminary directions on method**

A *grounded theory* design was adopted for this study for two core reasons. First, it emphasises openness to the *emergence* of themes and categories rather than the *forcing* of themes and categories from text. Such an approach avoids the imposition of precast formulae and

conclusions. A second and related reason is associated with the phenomenon under consideration: the experience of a diverse group of males for whom one major element is always common—they rarely talk of their experience of life. Their reluctance exists in order to avoid what they regard as certain rejection by others whom they believe will not understand the complexities of their lives. The central strategies in a grounded theory approach mean that it has an inherent capacity for managing sensitive research.

The participant's experience of being understood is critical to this project. If I cannot, as a person and as a researcher, demonstrate that I am open to, and can understand, their experience prior to, or at least at the beginning of, my contact, then the research will not proceed. If I cannot also demonstrate that my methods will be non-invasive, and imbued with patience, understanding, and the ability to wait for the gradual unfolding of their narrative, then the research will not happen or it will be poor research. The demonstration of compassion and understanding is critical. Thus, the issue of *methodological fit* is important here. First, the analytic categories must *fit* with the text that emerges. Second, the research design must *fit* with the participants and that means a *fit* along several lines. The method must be sensitive to where they are psychosocially. It must also be sensitive to how they experience relating. Finally, the method must be sensitive to their emotional availability. Grounded theory, at least in the variant form to be discussed in this chapter, is my starting point.

Outlining the development of grounded theory sheds light on the limitations of its origins, the proximity of its original form to a more positivist approach, criticisms of the approach, and the development of divergent views and practices within the method. A brief overview of this developmental pathway will be provided in subsequent sections of this chapter. In brief, the adopted method is based on grounded theory. It is underpinned by a strong interpretive process (participant and researcher). It begins with unstructured in-depth interviews that are undertaken using a recursive and participant-driven style of questioning. The aim of this

particular interview process is to provide a research landscape that could be, in part, controlled by the participant.

### **Grounded theory**

The discovery of grounded theory was situated within a larger historical academic context that viewed the development of research and the acquiring of knowledge within a positivist frame of reference, a matter that has already been canvassed in this chapter. As Glaser and Strauss (1965) indicated in a paper preceding their seminal 1967 work, it was an academic environment where qualitative research was viewed as “a preliminary, exploratory effort to quantitative research since only quantitative research yields rigorously verified findings and hypotheses” (p. 5).

As a result of some of the early practices in the area, qualitative research was viewed as a cluster of individualised approaches that were “generally labelled as ‘unsystematic’, ‘impressionistic’, or ‘exploratory’” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 223). As an important indicator of that methodological moment, even quantitative research that attempted a degree of flexibility was also referred to as “sloppy” or “unsophisticated” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 223). Their critique of the dominant methods of that time was that sociologists “over-emphasised rigorous testing of hypotheses, and de-emphasised the discovery of what concepts and hypotheses are relevant for the substantive area being researched” (Glaser & Strauss, 1965, p. 5). Further, they had come to a position that raised “doubts as to the application of the canons of quantitative research as criteria for judging the credibility of substantive theory based on qualitative research” (Glaser & Strauss, 1965, p. 5). Grounded theory became a “way of thinking about and conceptualising data” and the method was soon “adapted to studies of diverse phenomena” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 163).

Along with a fracturing of thought in respect of research methods, a demarcation was now in place that was to shift the emphasis away from qualitative research as a preamble to quantitative research into a stand-alone position within the research arena. Glaser and Strauss

(1965) defined “*qualitative research* – whether utilizing observation, intensive interviews, or any type of document – *as a strategy concerned, with the discovery of substantive theory, not with feeding quantitative researches*” (p. 5; original emphasis).

### **The original position: Glaser and Strauss**

As MacLeod (2001) indicates, a grounded theory approach to qualitative research is about the “analysing of data, rather than a technique for data collection” (p. 71). It is about the researcher being immersed in the text, comparative analysis, the emergence of conceptual categories, and the generation of theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). An important point to note about the early work of Glaser and Strauss is that it was more about principles than about process (McLeod, 2001).

For Glaser and Strauss (1967), their first agreed position involved (a) the *researcher moving into the research field*, where (b) *observation* was the main task. As the researcher is not a “passive receiver of impressions, but is naturally drawn into actively finding data pertinent to developing and verifying” a position (Glaser & Strauss, 1965, p. 6), immersion and observation are quickly followed by (c) *hypothesising*. What follows from that experience is the development of (d) *multiple hypotheses*, some of which are forced on the researcher by the power of the passing events. The comparative analysis of incidents results in the (e) “*purposeful systematic generation*” of theory. *Categories and properties* (f) are developed out of the (g) *coding* of the text and (h) *comparative analysis* can produce an (i) *integration of the categories*. However “integration is not forced on theory” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 41).

A key element of this comparative analysis is that of (j) *theoretical sampling*, the process of data collection “whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 45). Another key and related element of theoretical sampling is that of (k) *theoretical sensitivity*: the result of the researcher thinking, in theoretical terms, about the material of interest. The goal of theoretical sensitivity is

the progressive choice of participants, the result of which is a strengthening of the categories, the broadening of properties, and the creation of depth in the subsequently generated theory. The researcher will write (l) *memos* that contain the essence of the researcher's thinking about all aspects of the research process. The memo "becomes a directive for further coding in the field notes" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 112) and this helps in the refinement of ideas and of theory. Another key feature of grounded theory is that of (m) *theoretical saturation*, a point in the research where "no additional data are being found whereby the [researcher] can develop properties of the category" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 61). The process involved in grounded theory is one characterised by the (n) "*continual intermeshing of data collection and analysis*" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 73). The continual return to the field is what grounds the process. The return of the researcher to the aloneness of coding and analysing is what provides for reflexivity, depth of categorisation and coherence of theorising. McLeod (2001) makes two important points about grounded theory. First, any "in-depth reading of the relevant research and theoretical literature follows data collection rather than precedes it" (p. 80). Second, while it is not spoken of explicitly by either Glaser or Strauss as a *reflexive posture*, McLeod (2001) indicates that "a researcher could not possess sufficient theoretical sensitivity [to engage in grounded theory] without being able to reflect on his or her biases and assumptions" (p. 71) and this, in essence, is reflexivity within the research process.

### **Further developments**

Significant developments have occurred in respect of grounded theory since 1967. Rennie (1998) indicates that Strauss and Corbin (1990) modified the original grounded theory approach in four key ways. First, the researchers recalled experiences relating to the area under study are regarded as "legitimate empirical data". Second, hypothesis testing is brought to the fore as an "integral" aspect of the "constant comparison" of data with this hypothesising based on rational grounds that alters the understanding of the data and influences the further collection

of data. Third, consideration of the “conditions influencing the phenomenon should *not* be limited to those indicated by the data” (Rennie, 1998, p. 105). Finally, the use of a “axiomatic schema” that converts “social phenomena into a process is ... mandatory” (Rennie, 1998, p. 105). These changes represent a significant shift in the grounded theory approach. Glaser (1992) published his own correction to the 1990 work of Strauss and Corbin. He criticised it for being a caricature of their original work, devoid of scholarship, “rendered shallow” (Glaser, 1992, p. 122) and likely to produce research that “is not based on emergent relevance with categories that fit and work” (Glaser, 1992, p. 4). For Glaser, the work of Strauss and Corbin (1990), while producing research, does not allow for the emergence of the voice of the participants (Glaser, 1992; Melia, 1996). Charmaz (2005) outlines more recent developments in grounded theory research and notes that an ongoing connection to the “Chicago school antecedents” is imperative, albeit from a constructionist rather than positivist perspective, challenging the epistemology of the original formulations, the claims to objectivity and neutrality, the nature of data and the original perspective on participants (p. 508).

### **A position on grounded theory research**

For the purpose of this research project, the original position on grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as clarified by Glaser (1978; 1992; 1998; 2002) has been adopted as a *starting point*. It is a Glaserian approach to grounded theory. This approach has been adopted because of the emphasis on *induction* and *emergence*. A second reason for an initial alignment with Glaser is his later emphasis on the *avoidance of forcing* text into categories and theories (Glaser, 1978, 1992) not simply out of the text but also from the reflections and theorising of the researcher separate to the text itself. All of this is set against an understanding of the *background* and of the hermeneutic tradition within the social sciences as explored within earlier parts of this chapter (Taylor, 1985, 1993, 1995a). Rennie also adopts a strong emphasis on the hermeneutic tradition (Rennie, 2000; Rennie & Fergus, 2006) and this is woven into the current use of

grounded theory. While Rennie's critique of Glaser, Strauss and Corbin has been useful in a refinement of grounded theory, his emphasis on the *bracketing* our preconceptions in grounded theory is a move away from the richest aspects of the dialogical nature of *understanding* so important in this current work. In the current research, that which is regarded as a potential bias is incorporated into the research process, not as data (text) but, as the subject of reflexive action. It is thought about, reflected upon and articulated within the research journal and memos, and is a necessary part of the dialogical action and the interpretive process. It is a core aspect of the method which aims to free up the voice of the *other* (Kristeva, 1991; Taylor, 1991).

Tapping into my own *background* experience is the beginning of categorisation (interpretative understanding) within the grounded theory method adopted in this current research. As Rennie and Fergus (2006) have indicated, we are involved in research where the "goal" is that "of pulling together the strands of ... meaning" within the text. In this process, "a felt sense of the strands is present in our bodies. When we direct our attention to the felt sense, it gives rise to memories, associations and images" (p. 494). It is this that Shotter (1993) refers to when he speaks of "the kind of knowledge one has *from within* a situation, a group, social institution, or society; it is what we might call a 'knowing-from?'" (p. 19). When I am *trying categories on for size*, I am delving into my reflected-upon *background*, shared experience and shared encounters to gain some sense of whether the categories fit the text. It is a hermeneutic process infused into grounded theory. There is an essential emphasis on *methodological hermeneutics* (Woolfolk et al., 1988), where a double hermeneutic is at play: within the researcher and on the text (Alvesson & Sköldböck, 2000).

Finally, as noted earlier, rather than verification as spoken of within the early formulations of grounded theory (Annells, 1996), validation and rigour are adopted (Charmaz, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Rennie, 1998) along with reflexivity (Saukko, 2005) as core elements of maintaining rigour within the research. These notions and the associated *criteria* and *techniques* are discussed later in this chapter.

## Research design

Various components make up the research design for this project. Each will be described in some detail so that the reader may be able to comprehend the complexity of the research project and understand the thinking behind the processes that were enacted.

### Sampling

In terms of sampling, the aim of the research design was to build a set of strategies that would assist me to gain access to young males who engage in street-based sex work. I made initial contact with potential participants through a number of different field sources: by approaching potential participants on the street at *The Wall*, through a counselling service; through other participants; through other health agencies; and by using the Internet. Participants predominantly came from *The Wall* and by referral from other participants.

Three types of sampling were utilised in this study: opportunistic, snowball, and theoretical (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1995). Given the volatility of the research field and the transient nature of participants who work *The Wall*, *opportunistic sampling* (N=14) was the first approach taken in the seeking of participants. A second form of sampling was undertaken as a result of the first interviews that were carried out. *Snowball sampling* (N=7) utilised the established networks of young males who work *The Wall*. This strategy was built on the trust established within the first few interviews. This allowed for further penetration into the established street-based network. It also allowed for a comparative analysis of males who work *The Wall*. These two forms of sampling raised questions that necessarily introduced the need for *theoretical sampling* (N=6) within the research design. Where did these young men come from? Where did they go to after working *The Wall*? Are there other young men who aspire to engage in sex work, see *The Wall*, and then choose not to work there? What other forms of work are there besides street-based sex work and why is this alternative form chosen over SMSW? In order to

grapple with these questions, which arose from the initial interviews, other sources for participants were sought. Young men who engage in sex work using the Internet was a point of client recruitment. Young men who had previously worked *The Wall* but who no longer engaged in SMSW were also sought out.

As mentioned previously, the main gathering point for SMSW in Sydney is known as *The Wall* — a 200-metre strip of Darlinghurst Road, in an inner suburb of Sydney. It is bounded by a technical college (formerly a gaol), a university, a court house, a Catholic church, a hospice, and a park. The name *The Wall* emerged over time because of the power and strength of the barrier created to restrain prisoners in the former gaol. It is a structure over 15-metres high and 3-metres deep. It is imposing and immovable. Forty-four young males were approached to be interviewed in this study. The majority of 44 potential participants were approached at *The Wall* although seven of the 44 were approached through the Internet. Of those who were approached, 27 were interviewed: 25 from contact at *The Wall* and two from contact over the Internet. The average age of the participants was 23 at the time of interview, with the youngest being 17 years of age. Twenty-five of the participants had experienced homelessness from an early age. Fourteen had experienced juvenile or adult incarceration, or both. Twenty-two had not completed high school with seven not completing their second year of secondary schooling. Two had completed university degrees and two others had begun to attend but had withdrawn from university. Further details about my initial and ongoing contact with participants can be found in Appendix 2. A demographic grid of the participant group is available in Table 1.



## **Data collection**

Forty-four individuals were approached to be interviewed. Twenty-seven interviews were carried out over a 3 year period from 2000 through to 2003. Initial discussions regarding the research were carried out at a place of convenience to the potential participant. This included my office, their home, parks, and at *The Wall*. Most of the interviews took place at an office independent of my work place. Other interviews occurred at the participant's home or in a counselling room at my office. At all times, the single criterion for choice of venue was the participants' comfort and privacy. All of the interviews were face to face and ranged from one to three hours. For three of the participants, a second interview took place, on two occasions at their request and on one occasion at my request.

## **Background to the interviews**

In keeping with the emphasis on encouraging the voice of the participant, a recursive and participant-driven style of in-depth unstructured interview was carried out. The first aim of the interview was to establish ease and comfort in the participant and to assure the person in a formal and informal manner of the basic boundaries of the interview. Confidentiality was assured and the participant was informed that the duration of the interview would be determined by the participant. The purpose and goal of the interview was provided in an information sheet (see Appendix 3) and the participant was assured of my willingness to assist them in gaining support if required. As Taylor (1991) indicates, "human beings are constituted in conversation" (p. 314). This then was the fundamental premise of the interview; it was "conversation as research" (Kvale, 1996, p. 5).

### Interview process

Interviews usually took place very soon after first contact with the participant — or not at all. This recognises the fact that my research was a very minor aspect of a complex existence that often involved transience, homelessness, substance use and the ever-present fear of violence. While not pressing the request for an interview, I was nonetheless aware that if there was a positive response to my initial request, then my availability needed to be assured, regardless of the time or the place. This meant that interviews occurred at varying times of the day and night, according to the participant's availability, sense of ease, level of intoxication, and general emotional and physical stability.

While ethical issues are considered elsewhere in this chapter, it is important to note that organising an interview was not the sole or dominating criterion in my contact with participants. Partly as a result of my prior and ongoing contact with a number of the participants, but also as a result of good ethical principles, the wellbeing of the participant was a significant factor in the interview process. Careful assessment of the viability of carrying out an interview was always the first consideration. This meant carrying out a brief psychosocial assessment. The assessment considered the following issues: general health, mental health, level of social stability, level of intoxication (if any), level of suicidal ideation (if any), the existence of external events likely to cause significant distress, and the level of personal support in their lives. Where necessary, an offer was made to assist the participant to gain access to counselling or other forms of assistance. A list of possible support agencies was provided to each participant (see Appendix 3). One participant accepted this offer.

Each interview began with a short amount of *small talk*, mostly generated by the participant but sometimes generated by me. The formal part of each interview began with the same introductory question:

*When did you first come into the inner city?*

The question was chosen in order to instigate a research conversation, without focussing explicitly on the topic of the research. While there were interview probes that I had considered during a cursory reading of the literature, this was the only pre-established question for the interview process. Each of the participants read (or had read to him) the information sheet. A consent form was signed by each of the participants and in one case by the mother of a participant because he was under 18 at the time of the interview. The reason for beginning the research interview away from the central issue of SMSW was to ensure that each participant was able to approach the topic of SMSW as and when he desired— or not at all.

While many participants raised their involvement with sex work within the space of 30-minutes, one participant did not begin to speak of his involvement in sex work until after one-and-a-half hours. While this was an anxiety-ridden interview for me, I was assured that SMSW was something that he wanted to explore, rather than an issue about which he was being quizzed. This *freedom to explore or not* is what I have referred to as a participant-driven interview process. It was a crucial aspect of the research design as it was an act of handing over significant control of the interview direction to the participant.

After the initial introductory question was posed and an answer was forthcoming, I endeavoured to apply an open-ended and recursive style of questioning with the participant (Minichiello et al., 1995). I stayed with the question and his response, helping him to tease out his answer. By so doing, we were able to co-create a deeper understanding of his life experience. Care was taken not to reiterate or load a point such that the participant would feel badgered and thus respond with what he thought I wanted to hear.

All except one of the interviews were carried out solely with the participant. One participant attended his second interview with his girlfriend. While the material that was gained from this interview was of significance, a dynamic was at times present whereby his girlfriend answered for, or commented on, an issue that he raised. The presence of multiple voices in this single interview was, at times, useful as it appeared to assist the participant to recall experiences

and hence to deepen our understanding. This added understanding to the categories that emerged. That said, at several points in the interview, his girlfriend scoffed at his responses. While this necessarily altered the character of this interview, it was the participant's choice to seek a second interview and to bring his partner. One interpretation of this may be that the interview provided him with the possibility of explaining his experience to his partner.

At the conclusion of each interview, I explained to each participant that the interview would be transcribed and de-identified, and that he would be welcome to read and comment on the interview transcript. Only one of the participants took up this offer.

### **Naturalistic observations**

Ongoing contact, in some form, was a key issue with 24 of the 27 participants. With some, it was minor and sporadic contact, but with others contact was more regular. This included phone calls, visits by them to the agency where I work, requests for assistance with housing or counselling, or referrals for assistance beyond what our agency provided (e.g., medical services). This opportunity was thought of as an opportunity for naturalistic observations rather than as ongoing data collection, and while the material and insights were not considered data in the terms of this research methodology, they were nonetheless of significance to, and influential in, the research process. These naturalistic observations are captured and recorded in Appendix 2. They include, but are not limited to, events such as accidental or purposeful post-interview encounters, or distant observations at *The Wall*, and at other places, and the reaction of the participant to those various encounters.

### **Analysis of in-depth interviews using NVivo**

I have earlier provided the general parameters for the analysis of data for this project using grounded theory. Suffice at this point to outline the technical specifics of the data (textual)

analysis. Each of the interviews was tape recorded and these recordings were transcribed and then corrected against the tape recording on two occasions. The aim of this process was to become immersed in, and reflective on, the interview material. Immersion was also important in order for me to become aware of the subtle nuances present in each interview. The transcript was then imported into NVivo (QSR, 2002, 2006) for the purpose of computer-assisted textual analysis. More recent literature on research methods has indicated that where researchers use computer-based qualitative analysis programs, the final output from the research should include a discussion on the use and limits of the computer program in question (Bringer, Johnston, & Brackenridge, 2004).

I made a decision early in my research to gain expertise in the use of a computer-based textual analysis program known as NVivo (QSR, 2002, 2006). The basis of the decision was simple: I held a belief that such a program would make it easier for me to manage large amounts of textual material. NVivo was chosen because it was a local product and hence, ongoing support and training was readily available. NVivo was developed in Australia, initially out of La Trobe University (Richards, 2002). The aim of this program is to assist the researcher in the management and analysis of large amounts of textual, audio visual and graphical material within the context of qualitative research. Rather than suspending or superseding the central analytic role of the researcher, NVivo assists the researcher to manage the textual material at his or her disposal. First, it allows for the line by line coding of textual data. Second, this material can be gathered under stand-alone codes (i.e., Free Nodes) or gathered into related clusters of codes (i.e., Tree Nodes). The codes can be developed “in vivo”, that is, *live* and from the text as coding occurs. Third, as interviews are completed, they are imported into the project within NVivo and coding can be easily and progressively carried out against existing or new nodes. Fourth, nodes can be defined and the changes in definitions can be managed within the program. Finally, as it is a program designed specifically for textual material, other material such as memos, field notes and the research journal can also be imported into, or created within, the program. These

ancillary records can also be coded and entries within these documents can be linked, and cross-linked, to specific points within the interviews. The first major value in the program is that all project material is gathered in one file and the developing relationships between aspects of the project can be noted, marked and retrieved with ease. A second major value of the program is that as concepts are developed and intensified with new textual evidence, these developments can be gathered around nodes (codes) and also managed with ease. NVivo also allows for the development of conceptual models that can be easily presented in a graphical format. The increased sophistication of recent versions of the NVivo program has allowed for its use within a mixed methods research environment (Bazeley, 2002).

My use of NVivo was limited to three electronic processes subsequent to importing the interviews into the program: the line-by-line coding of text; the later thematic analysis of the text; and the recording of memos, field notes and a research journal, all of which were cross-linked with the textual material at relevant points. In specific detail, each interview was reviewed, line by line, for major and minor themes that were initially coded into simple categories or codes (Free Nodes). These were then given provisional definitions. Primary categories emerged and these were clustered together (Tree Nodes). Each set of categorical codes contained a series of sub-categories (Tree Nodes). Each category and sub-category was given an individual definition. Categories, subcategories and definitions evolved over time, and on occasion, were merged through a process of comparative analysis. Table 2 provides a list of the *primary categories and subcategories (Tree Nodes)* that emerged during the *first phase* of the textual analysis. It is a comprehensive list of categories and subcategories and represents the final makeup of the coding at the time of writing. The underlined Tree Nodes in Table 2 indicate the first of the major themes to be written-up. These were later explored in greater depth through a second and third phase of theoretical coding.

Table 2: Primary categories and subcategories (Tree Nodes)

Primary Category	Subcategory		
<u>Experiences</u>	Abuse Anger Being poor Belief and religion <u>Cleansing</u> Confusion Congruence <u>Connectivity</u> Crime <u>Damaged and dirty</u> <u>Dissonance</u> Drifting to the city Early sexual experience Fear Friendship	Homelessness Identity Influenced and led Institution <u>Intimacy</u> Isolation Judgement Leaving Loss and grief Masculinity Mental health Premature responsibility <u>Relationships</u> Rupture and repair Safety	School Sex <u>Sexual abuse</u> Shame Simpatico Solitude Stagnation <u>Substance abuse</u> Suicide Support Thinking and remembering Violence Work
<u>Male Sex Work</u>	Environment Experience MSW Faux First MSW	Lured by MSW Meaning Ongoing MSW Organisation	Pathways in Pathways out Risk Rules
<u>Outcomes</u>	Addiction Chaos <u>Connectivity</u> <u>Damaged</u> Desensitisation Detached Don't care Embodied silence Financial security	Indelible impression <u>Infections</u> Intrusive feelings <u>Intrusive thoughts</u> Isolation Maturity and wisdom Negativity Relationship Resilience	Self destruction Self harm Sexual intimacy Survival Sustained beliefs, goals, and directions Vulnerability
<u>Relationships: MSW</u>	Abusive Client Fag-lays	Friend Mugs Regulars	Sick ones Sugar-daddies
<u>Relationships: Other</u>	Family Friend	Mentor Partner	Peers Professionals
<u>Strategies</u>	Adaptation Altruism Assessment <u>Bottling, blocking, denial</u> <u>Boundaries</u> Carpe diem Conjuring images <u>Deception</u> Drugs for MSW Escape	Experimentation Explosion Forgetting <u>Get trained</u> Get work Meaning making <u>MSW for drugs</u> Negotiation Planning <u>Reflexivity</u>	Reframe negatives Running & roaming Settling <u>Solitude</u> <u>Story telling</u> Structure Taking it to the edge Withdrawal

The second and third phase of theoretical coding was a process of refinement within the coding process. Again, I used NVivo to carry out the second and third phases of coding and analysis. After the first phase of coding, I formulated the *participant-identified major themes (Free Nodes)* by noting the incidence of particular categories and sub-categories within the NVivo reports on coding. These reports indicated the level of repetition and emphasis placed on the

various themes as developed by each participant. I also considered the depth and strength of the themes. Throughout the interviewing and the coding, the principal aim was to be attentive to the voice of each participant. Each of the major themes emerged and represented a significant set of inter-related experiences in the life of each participant. Table 3 provides a list of the *participant-identified major themes (Free Nodes)* that were the result of a *second and third phase of coding* of the interviews. It was a form of theoretical coding as outlined by Glaser (1978; 1992). Again, NVivo was used in this process. All of the *participant-identified major themes* became the primary textual sources for the analysis chapters in the current research.

**Table 3: Participant-identified major themes (Free Nodes)**

<b>Alternative education</b>	<b>Untold stories</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Help-seeking/gaining</b>
<b>Relationships: MSW</b>	<b>Getting trained</b>	<b>MSW experiences</b>	<b>Relationships: Other</b>

It was clear from all three phases of coding that *story-telling* was a primary desire for each participant. It is likely that they agreed to the interview because they wanted to tell their story and because they wanted their story to be heard. On that basis, I chose to explore, in more fine-grained detail, a number of narratives that I considered indicative of the larger group of participants. It was a process of drilling down through four narratives with the aim of exposing the depth and breadth of the text: of *recounting untold stories*. I used NVivo to create Free Nodes for each of the four indicative participants and I carried out a fine-grain analysis of these four interviews, noting major themes and life events and the connections between these themes and events. In considering which individual narratives to explore, consideration was given to: age, place of origin, dominant sexual identification, the framing of sex work, future directions, mode of initial and ongoing sex work, and age of entry into SMSW. These narratives provided a richness and depth of understanding across many themes of which two were chosen to further analyse. Table 4 lists the interviews that were chosen as indicative of the other participants' untold stories. This Free Node coding work became the basis of the first of the analysis chapters.

**Table 4: Untold stories: Four indicative narratives**

<b>Brian</b>	<b>James</b>	<b>Nick</b>	<b>Steph</b>
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Table 5 provides a sample of preliminary *thematic coding* (in abridged form) on a fragment of text from the first phase of analysis using NVivo. The aim of this early textual analysis was the development of Free Nodes that were later clustered into Tree Nodes. Education, relationships, pathways, helping others, and structure, are all themes that emerged in this early analytic process using NVivo. It explores the interrelationship of themes in a fragment of text. This was the first of the interviews. Education appeared as a significant theme in the first interview and was repeated by other participants. It was identified, and written up, as a major theme and chapter.

**Table 5: Thematic coding — Education as a vehicle for change**

<u>Coding</u>	<u>Text Fragment</u>	<u>Coding</u>
<p>Negative experiences have led to a conclusion. Possible precursor to despair or change.</p>	<p><b>Richard 1(392)</b>                      I was at that point I had to give up, you know, <u>I needed my life back</u>. I couldn't - I just sat down and had a really big cry and, yeah, <u>I started working as an assistant nurse and also working The Wall too. Then I started working night shifts</u> as assistant nurse and that sort of <u>got me away from that</u> and, yeah, <u>then I just wanted to further on my education. I thought I can't work and use drugs and try and become a nurse</u> and say I care when, you know, you're <u>shoving a needle up your arm full of heroin and you're saying you care</u>, you know, so, yeah. From there I sort of went cold turkey and got into my. Tried to get into as an enrolled nurse, didn't accept me and then I <u>done my entrance exams and got in as an RN</u>, which I was quite happy to do as my ENs then my RNs, you know.</p>	<p>What is the meaning of this experience? Is it despair or catharsis? If it is catharsis, is it a precursor to something positive?</p>
<p>Structure leads to protection and this leads to options. Education becomes a pathway for renewed.</p>		<p>Working as a pathway forward. Query?? Helping others as a pathway forward? Relationships. A major category. Helping others as a sub-category.</p>
<p>Clarity of insight but relationships appear again as the motivating force (along with positive experiences) that leads to insight. Also role, place, function, and production of good.</p>		<p>Conflicted. Pathway out and yet remaining.</p>
<p>Positive experience produces motivation and practice change.</p>		<p>Resolution of the existential and pathway conflict</p>
<p>Education and the promise of a profession as the vehicle out of SMSW, defined as negative.</p>		<p>Removing a significant barrier brings on rolling insight.</p>
		<p>Structure (night-shift) removes options about which he is ambivalent. Other options come into focus – education. This is a major category. Sub-categories: structure as a way to remove obstacles; removal of obstacles as the way to view education on the horizon.</p>

As education emerged in many of the interviews, a meta-search was eventually carried out on all of the interviews using key education-related terms such as: teacher, school, education, subject, course, class, success, failure, and student. This provided substantial information about the ways that those engaged in male sex work related to education in the past and how they viewed education as a part of their future.

As a result of the analysis process, three major categorical threads were written up: first, the *untold and silent personal stories* (Chapter 4); second, the *place and significance of relationships* in their lives (Chapter 5); and third, *the place and significance of education* in their past, present and future (Chapter 6). While the analysis of text has occurred on the major themes that are the subject of this present work, I acknowledge the richness of the interviews and the reality that further textual analysis is possible. The aim of the analysis, up to the point of writing, has been to establish the major themes, as noted by the participants, and to explore these in as much detail as possible. A gradual and sequential approach to the textual analysis, and the writing process, recognises that the depth and richness of the research material is not exhausted by this current written work.

As a final technical note, participant quotes are included *verbatim*: no stylistic or grammatical editing has occurred. Correct age at time of interview is provided with the participant's alias just prior to his first quote [e.g., Frank (19) says that ...]. The participant's alias is provided at the end of each quote along with a numeric or alphanumeric reference mark specifying the interview number followed by the paragraph numbers in parentheses [e.g., Leyton 27(55-56)]. The paragraph numbers are generated within NVivo. The use of "a" or "b" before the enclosed paragraph number identifies whether it is the first (a) or second (b) interview [e.g., Jules 18a(27)].

## Evaluation in qualitative research

Evaluation is a key issue in any form of research. The critical issue here is the criteria and techniques by which a research project is evaluated. Parker (2004) and others (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Kirk & Miller, 1986; Whitemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001) note two critical issues regarding qualitative research. First, the inadequacy of applying a quantitative concept of rigour to evaluating qualitative research, and second, the difficulty of establishing criteria for judging validity in qualitative research. In this section, I will explore briefly these issues and outline the criteria and techniques by which I have considered validity and rigor.

### Rigour and validity

Debates about rigour and validity in qualitative research have been extensive and carried out over many years and have, at times, led the discussion about evaluation in qualitative research into an “epistemological quagmire” (Whitemore et al., 2001, p. 523). A number of theorists and researchers consider and set criteria for the achievement of validity and rigour in qualitative research (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Kvale, 1996; Minichiello et al., 1995; Morrow, 2005; Parker, 2004; Tindall, 1994). Whitemore, Chase and Mandle (2001) indicate that Lincoln and Guba’s “criteria [for evaluation] remain the gold standard” in terms of rigour and validity (p. 527). Rigour and validity are set within an environment of *criteria* (or standards) and *techniques* (actions employed to diminish identified threats to validity). There has been considerable debate about both the criteria and the techniques. For the purpose of this study, although the work of Lincoln (1995) and Guba and Lincoln (2005) have been considered, the synthesis provided by Whitemore, Chase and Mandle (2001) has been relied upon in my own consideration of validity and rigour.

According to their synthesis, Whitemore, Chase and Mandle (2001) indicate that the criteria for achieving validity and rigour are divided into primary and secondary criteria. The

primary criteria are: *credibility* (confidence that the researcher has provided a credible interpretation of the meaning of the data); *authenticity* (the interpretation and commentary reflects the experiences as lived by the participants); *criticality* (the presence of transparency, reflexivity and critical analysis in the research); and *integrity* (of process that ensures that checks and balances are present in the research).

Whittemore, Chase and Mandle (2001) also indicate a set of secondary criteria. They are: *explicitness* (the research process must be able to be followed via strategies such as an audit trail); *vividness* (descriptions within the research are thick and faithful, and present the salient features of a given theme); *creativity* (in the research design so that it fits the research problem; creativity is also present in the analysis and writing up of the work); *thoroughness* (in the sampling and analysis); *congruence* (between the research question and methods; data collection and analysis; current study and other relevant research; the findings of the research and clinical practice); and *sensitivity* (to the nature of human, cultural and social contexts).

### **Radical reflexivity as the basis of validity and rigour**

A key feature or technique in terms of rigour and validity in the current research is that of reflexivity. It acknowledges the fact that “research is always carried out from a particular standpoint, and the pretence to neutrality ... in psychology is disingenuous” (Parker, 1994, p. 13).

Taylor (1991) has described reflexivity and provided an added distinction and clarifying name:

By “radical reflexivity” I mean not only to focus on oneself, but on one’s own subjective experience. To be interested in my own health, or wealth, is to be reflexively oriented, but not radically. But when I examine my own experience, or scrutinize my own thinking, reflexivity takes a radical turn. (p. 304).

Rennie (2004) has further clarified and defined reflexivity as “self-awareness and agency within that self-awareness” (p. 183). The addition by Rennie of the notion of agency, which is implied by Taylor, means that it is not simply about awareness but also about action upon the ever-developing awareness within the person. I have chosen to adopt Taylor’s notion of radical

reflexivity, while incorporating Rennie's notion of agency, principally because of the lively level of embeddedness that I experienced before, during and after the research process. To be embedded within a research environment before, during, and after the research, and to have this sustained over decades, has consequences for this research. I come to each interview, no less informed (and loaded up) with my past and present than any of the participants. Though it is my aim to concentrate on the participant's material and on the research question, my past and present are alive and active in the interview room or on the street corner or in the park where we meet. This was more the case in some interviews than in others. The *background* to my conscious acting—the pre-understandings that arise out of a lifetime of experience—bleeds into every situation. It means that the act of suspending bias appears difficult, if not impossible, to achieve even within the context of reflexivity and transparency.

Although there is a heightened awareness of *otherness*, my own *background* infuses into current experience and is ever present. Far from my *background* being negated or suspended, the *other* is heard as a *primus inter pares*: a first among equals. For the purpose of the research one voice is heard as louder than the *other*. Reflexively handled, in the way that Taylor implies, bias floats in the foreground alongside the richness of the foreigner who is now freed, welcomed and desired. This is a rich tapestry against which I can now consider the *techniques* associated with maintaining rigour and validity.

### **Techniques for validity and rigour**

Implied, and at times explicit, within the criteria is the implication that the principles must be actioned through a set of techniques that give practical life to validity and rigour within qualitative research. The following sections outline the key *techniques* that have been adopted within this research project.

### **The audit trail: Journal, nodes, and memos**

In terms of the techniques that are applied to achieve rigour and validity, Morse (1998) notes that an important aspect of ensuring rigour within the research process is the establishment and maintenance of an audit trail within the research project. It is a set of documents and processes that ensure validity within the research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) and subsequent authors (Morrow, 2005; Olesen, 2005; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) also note the importance of developing an audit trail within the research, the aim of which is to heighten transparency. In general, this consists of a variety of pieces of documentation that includes: raw data, data reduction and analysis products, data reconstruction and synthesis products, process notes, material relating to intentions and dispositions, and instrument development information.

There are three key features of the audit trail in the current research project. They are: the *project journal*, *node (or category) descriptors*, and the various types of *memos*. The *project journal* contains the process notes and reflections that generally occurred along the research pathway. These notes record the macro aspect of the project: the development of a research problem, the formulation and refinement of the research question, the development of an interview process, and the formulation of the lead question. The process notes also include material that relates to the interview experience: thoughts about the participants, observations and notes from field work. The journal process notes document decisions relating to the sampling process, pre- and post-interview reflections, and the resulting conceptual developments. Finally, it also records directions for writing up naturalistic observations.

The second aspect of the audit trail was the use of *node descriptors*. NVivo (QSR, 2002, 2006) was used throughout the research as the computer-based device for gathering interviews, developing categories (nodes), coding, journaling and the maintenance of memos (Bringer et al., 2004). Limitations were placed on the use of NVivo so that it did not constrain or force the emergence or blending of categories. Within NVivo, categories are referred to as *nodes* and the process of assigning data to nodes is referred to as *coding*. Each node has a descriptor. Care was

taken to monitor the development and refinement of node descriptors so that the developmental process could be used as a point of reflection for the researcher and an aspect of the audit trail.

Table 6 provides a sample *node descriptor*.

**Table 6: Node descriptor**

<p><b>Category:</b> Strategies</p> <p><b>Description:</b> Actions or approaches used by the person, particularly but not exclusively, at moments of crisis or difficulty. These are contextualised processes rather than isolated actions. They can have negative and/or positive intent. They can also have negative and/or positive outcomes for the person, the client and others.</p> <p><b>Sub-Category:</b> Bottling, blocking &amp; denial</p> <p><b>Description:</b> Terms indicative of a strategy: terms first used by Brian in his first interview (12a). The themes underlying these terms appears to recur in other interviews. Variant terms are used but with the same intention. The strategy is located around the need to deal with unpleasant experiences. These may or may not be associated with SMSW. Blocking out the issue; it is about shutting off the feeling or emotion and of choosing not to think of the experience. Whether this works or not as a strategy (and this is another issue), it is aimed at emotional survival.</p>
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Behind the project journal, perhaps the most significant aspect of ensuring rigour and validity was the recording of *memos*. There were two categories of *memos*: *theoretical memos* and *reflexive memos*. Theoretical memos were developed to record the development of ideas about SMSW as they arose through my reading, thinking and interviewing. Table 7 provides a sample *theoretical memo*. This memo marks a significant moment in both the interview phase and simultaneous narrative analysis process. After 16 interviews, the need to search for difference was evident. Negative case interviewing and analysis was a core result of the reflexive process (Minichiello et al., 1995).

Table 7: Theoretical memo

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What is extremely clear after the interview with both Jacob (17a&b) and Jules (18a&b) is that the encounter – and every point within the encounter – can influence the researcher and the participant, what questions arise and the answers that are provided. In other words, the context of the interview can never be separated from the participants integral to that interview. This needs to be declared in the writing up of the dissertation as a core aspect of the methodology.

Why interview Jacob and Jules? An important sampling choice.

After interviewing a number of current and former street-based male sex workers, I began a search for new participants who were different. I sought individuals less preoccupied or overwhelmed with or by a negative personal history and who responded differently to their sex work experience. I also sought individuals who perhaps had greater control or choice and who regarded involvement in male sex work as a free work choice rather than a necessity driven by drug-related poverty. In other words, I was looking for individuals with a different history and different current experience with the aim of seeing why involvement with sex work began with a consideration of work at *The Wall* but did not include *The Wall* and the many negative aspects of male sex work so generally associated with involvement with *The Wall*.

To that end, I searched the Internet for male sex work sites. Having found a number, I emailed a variation on the Participant Information Sheet to each of the 11 MSWs discovered with the aim of securing their involvement in the project. Two net-based MSWs responded. Jacob initially responded by email with arrangements being made by phone. I was careful to secure their consent to contact at every point in the process. In other words, if they contacted by email and I needed to contact by phone, I would seek permission to contact by phone. Although this may sound finicky, the privacy of MSWs is crucial to them – each to varying degrees – and discovering the comfortable pathway of connection is crucial to establishing and maintaining rapport. In fact, I discovered that my hesitation and careful approach to establishing the various levels of communication endeared each of them to me. Their confidence in me was almost immediate, as was their willingness to confide intimate details regarding their personal and working lives.

The second form of memo developed throughout the research project was the *reflexive memo*. These memos recorded my ideas, thoughts and emotions in and around the research experience. Table 8 provides a sample *reflexive memo*. This sample memo arose because of the impact on me of interviewing two particular participants. The impact of listening to recounted tragedy—that also contained elements of positive adaptation—ignited memories and fears that were clearly *of me* and of the *background* in me. The *reflexive memo* is my process for bringing that which is hidden in the *background* into the foreground.

Table 8: Reflexive memo

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I've just been re-reading the narratives of Richard (1) and Damien (4). They are very different in their experience of SMSW: both young when first in SMSW; one gay-identified; one straight-identified. Tragedy and desire are strong features of their experience. Both have an impact on me. Emotion is strong in me when I'm faced with their tragedy. Their desire and experience of sex spark off a strong mix of feelings in me. When I am closest to their expressions of desire, I am sometimes, maybe often, initially distracted by my own desire and the absence of intimacy. I cannot remove or avoid this interaction. I cannot fear its presence. I try to welcome it but sometimes the intensity of their experience and it's proximity to my need makes the need for *radical reflexivity* (RR) imperative; without it, they do not survive and my *background* swamps the analysis. With it (RR), Damien's narrative seems to break forth, separate to my questions, even where the questions may be similar.

How are young boys when they're engaged in SMSW? Do they become like little boys wanting to cuddle up and no more? Richard was a little boy when he began. He wanted support, affection and a listening ear. Even more the case, Damien was very young and sought a surrogate father. And when the "mug" wanted more, but with none of the father-like dependency, this appears to create a dissonance within Damien. What are the consequences of this dissonance? Or is this sensation of dissonance all of me with the reality being that the young male simply wants a commercial transaction? How much is this my own psychological projection onto another person's experience? Is it just my moralising? I have re-examined the narrative carefully. Damien and Richard want many things. What they wanted changes and varies throughout the text. Certain personal non-MSW experiences are desired. They also want money.

I sometimes wonder whether they are barbarised by being with barbarians. The starting point for this thought is me. I can see that clearly. But Damien has experienced things that have the capacity to barbarise. But it is not simply located around SMSW as I first thought. Consider the wider context. Note: I need to keep testing the influence of my own *background* on questions, interpretations and conclusions.

A key aim of the research design has been to avoid what Kvale (1996) refers to as "biased subjectivity" which produces "sloppy and unreliable work" (p. 212). Instilling a high level of reflexivity and employing related techniques has ensured that the current research retains *credibility* in the analysis of text, *authenticity* by accurately recording the experience of the participants, *criticality* through reflexivity, and *integrity* through the use of a detailed audit trail (Whittemore et al., 2001).

## Ethical considerations

There is an inherent conflict present in most research between the desire to increase knowledge, and the responsibility to protect individuals and groups from harm or exploitation (Allen, 2002). This is particularly significant when considering vulnerable adolescents and young adults. Young males who work *The Wall* are certainly either potentially or actually vulnerable. Great care was exercised in the resolution of this inherent conflict. Four key principles have been monitored throughout the research process: (i) Respect for autonomy (a respect for the rights of individuals and their right to determine direction in their lives); (ii) Beneficence (doing or promoting good); (iii) Non-maleficence (avoiding or preventing harm); and (iv) Justice (respect for individual and group rights).

The monitoring of ethical practice in the research is particularly relevant because of my dual role as both a researcher and counselling practitioner. In that regard, and as Haverkamp (2005) has indicated, an added layer of thoughtfulness has been adopted in the form of *professional reflexivity*: a deliberate, active and ongoing process of reflection about the impact that my social location (e.g., social class, gender, sexual identity, age, ethnicity, education), values and beliefs, personal history and professional role exercise and influence on the course and outcome of my research project.

## Ethics approval

Ethics approval for the study was granted through the University of New England (Australia) *Human Research Ethics Committee* (HREC) (Approval Number HE00/0149). Approval was granted with the following conditions: first, that the researcher provide an “independent source of counselling in the event that participants may become upset as a result of the research”; second, that the “fate of the [interview] tapes should be advised in the Information Sheet for participants”. Both conditions were fulfilled and documentation regarding both conditions can be

viewed in Appendix 3 of this dissertation. The research was also approved by the *Ethics and Professional Standards Committee* of the agency at which I work as a counsellor. The major condition of that approval was that I not interview participants who were—previously or at the time during the research—my clients in counsellor. That condition was fulfilled.

Given the nature of the participant group for this research, participants were advised during the introductory process of the contents of the Information Sheet and were given a copy to read and keep prior to signing the Informed Consent Form. No participants withdrew their consent subsequent to providing the initial consent. One participant sought independent counselling subsequent to his first interview and reported during the second interview that his participation had assisted him to move forward in his life. He regarded approaching a counsellor as an important and positive part of this process.

### **Non-identification of participants**

Respect for the rights and privacy of the participants (and those people and places mentioned by participants) has been a key feature of this research project. Male sex work carries with it a public stigma about which most if not all of the participants are acutely aware and sensitive. As such, an alias was chosen for each of the participants (and those people and places mentioned by participants). While I originally considered allowing each of the participants to choose their own alias, the network of street-based sex workers can be volatile. Aggression and retribution can be regular aspects of living and working on the street. On that basis and for the protection of participants, complete anonymity was chosen as a key strategy. If any participant read the research summary or other publications, no identification would be possible.

### **Informed consent**

An HREC approved Informed Consent form was signed by each participant (see Appendix 4 and Appendix 5). The HREC determined that in respect of legal minors (that is, participants under the age of 18), parental consent was also required. One participant was 17 at the time of the interview. Informed consent was gained from his mother and also from him. The option was also provided to participants for them to record their consent on the tape recording device rather than on a signed consent form. A *paper trail* is a more tangible admission of involvement with an activity they fear others will neither comprehend nor excuse. It was also feared by some participants that a paper trail with a signature could be an admission of guilt if the consent form fell into the wrong hands (Allen, 2002). Allowing for a verbal and recorded consent took into account literacy and numeracy issues faced by some participants.

### **Issues of illegality**

Within the New South Wales legal system, prostitution is illegal when carried out near a school, church, hospital or public place, or within view from a dwelling ("Summary Offences Act," 1988). The place where all but two of the participants began their sex work—*The Wall*—is bounded by a church, hospice, college, university and public park. Beyond this relatively minor form of illegality, the issue of illegal behaviour comes potentially to the fore in the stories contained within interview transcripts. Two points must be made at this point. First, a declaration regarding the limits of confidentiality is contained in the information sheet (see Appendix 3) and these limits were clearly explained to each participant. Second, it is important to remember the bounds of what is being created within the narrative. As Riessman (1993) indicates,

When talking about their lives, people lie sometimes, forget a lot, exaggerate, become confused, and get things wrong. Yet they are revealing truths. These truths don't reveal the past "as it actually was", aspiring to a standard of objectivity. They give us instead the truths of our experience. (p. 22)

What I am exploring through this research are the co-created narratives of adolescent and young adult males as they try to understand their experience across many years and many issues. These are evolving stories, as is their understanding. In this co-creation, we are not about the business of creating replicas of the past, let alone objective accounts of actual reality. In reality, these accounts are incomplete representations that change across time. During the interviews, events are described, as they see them, as they remember them, as they are able to speak of them at that time. This is not to say that the next retelling will not be different. My obligations to confidentiality, and ethical and legal responses, are set against this understanding of the narratives as fragile parts of an evolving story that is rarely if ever comprehended in its entirety.

### **After the research, more happens!**

It is normal to expect that at the conclusion of an interview, the participant bids farewell to the researcher, only to speak again at the conclusion of the research, or perhaps never again. This is the exception and not the rule in the current research. Ongoing contact was maintained with many of the participants because at the conclusion of the interview, we picked up where we had left off. I again became the director of an agency to which they often experienced great attachment. While never their counsellor, I was a counsellor to others, and they saw my interactions, and we interacted in the activities area of the agency. So, for a few moments in time, an interview took place. This interview was inevitably influenced by their prior contact with me. For some of the participants, the interview enhanced my later contact with them. Appendix 2 provides some detail on each of the participants and includes naturalistic observations.

## Methodological strengths and limitations

The research set out to explore the experience of adolescent and young adult males engaged in street-based sex work. The participants were aged between 17 and 34 at the time of the interview. I interviewed 27 out of a total of 44 young males who were potential participants. As such, I interviewed people who were willing to tell of their experience. The research and the methodology employed is coloured by their willingness as much as it is also coloured by those who did not wish to participate. This is a primary limitation of the project. There are voices that remain silent. There are stories as yet untold.

The choice to allow the interviews to be participant-driven, while I believe the correct decision, nonetheless circumscribed the issues and areas covered. A more structured interview protocol may have elicited different information or other perspectives. While I gained significant access to their thoughts, emotions and their experience of SMSW, areas that I also wished to cover in greater detail remained either untouched or explored only to a limited degree. This was because of the decision to allow the interview to progress at a pace and in a direction that was driven largely by the participant. The first of these issues (the missing 17) is a clear limitation. The second of these issues (participant-driven interviews) is both a strength and a limitation of this present study.

## Conclusion

This chapter has described the orientation of this research by locating a research tradition. It also locates the researcher. Both are central to understanding the research methodology and the research design. I have considered the issues of evaluation and ethics. Finally, I have explored the limitations of the methodology and design. I have presented a theoretical perspective on social psychological research that emphasises *human kinds* as beings located within a historical, social and cultural landscape. This evolves through the interactions

that necessarily involve shared understandings and interpretations. I explored the origins and variations in a known methodology (grounded theory) and described a position in relation to grounded theory. The emphasis has been on developing a research methodology that is clear, precise and logical. That said, I also note that the final form of the methodology was flexible enough to allow me to reach and establish rapport with a marginalised group of people — those engaged in street-based sex work. The development of this particular methodology has been a complex endeavour, with shifts and turns occurring when new insight emerged. These changes were based on contact with the participants. This dynamic approach was tempered by the need to remain within the general parameters of a known methodology. Finally, I have presented the criteria against which I have attempted to judge and evaluate my own work. Radical reflexivity, principles regarding validity and rigour, and a series of techniques have been described.

Perhaps the most significant element that binds all these elements together is that of ethics. At all times in the forefront of my mind has been the understanding that I am researching *with* a group of people, many of whom have experienced lives tormented by loss and deprivation. My overriding obligation as a person and as a researcher has been a duty of care for them as fellow human beings.

In the next chapter, I begin a presentation of the results of my research, starting with an exploration of four indicative narratives (Chapter 4). I then move on to explore the place of relationships in the lives of those engaged in street-based male sex work (Chapter 5). Finally, I explore the place of education in their lives (Chapter 6). These next three chapters present the lived reality of young males who, during some part of their life, have engaged in street-based sex work at a place in Sydney called *The Wall*.

As I indicated in the previous chapter, during the interviews, and throughout the process of textual analysis, *the desire to tell a personal story* was the dominant reflection I had about each participant. While I could not tell the story of each person, it was clear that writing, in great detail, about some of them, was imperative to this exploration of street-based male sex work.

That is the rationale behind Chapter 4, the first of the analysis chapters. Within that chapter, *relationship* was a constant theme, and that is the rationale for Chapter 5. Of the many and varying types of relationships and experiences encountered by those who engage in SMSW, *education* was, perhaps surprisingly, a key experience. That is the rationale behind Chapter 6. Untold stories, relationships, and education. These are the major themes that dominant the next three chapters in this work.

# Chapter 4

## UNTOLD STORIES: FOUR INDICATIVE NARRATIVES IN SMSW

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### Introduction

The exploration of SMSW must begin with an unpacking of the life narratives of young males who work *The Wall*. In this place, understanding is sought and gained. Any comprehensive understanding of the person within the phenomenon may only come about by exploring the individual narratives that capture the experience of the person over his life span. It is in the critical illumination of daily existence that we are able to approach understanding in the often hidden world that is male sex work on the street.

Although this set of narratives is about individuals and the telling of their own stories, those engaged in SMSW also speak of other people such as: family, friends, clients, police, health and welfare workers, and lovers. In so doing, they illuminate the world around them as they dare to speak of themselves. It is rich because we connect with their reality; it is instructive because they introduce us to the world as they see it. This is the aim in this chapter: to connect with their reality and to be instructed about their world.

This chapter explores the narratives of four males engaged in SMSW: Brian, Nick, Steph and James. I have chosen the four participants on the basis of diversity: age, experience prior to SMSW, experience within SMSW, psychosocial responses to SMSW, pathways in and out of SMSW, sexual identity, and place of origin. Individually and combined, these narratives provide rich and diverse snapshots across the lifespan. Specifically on the issue of SMSW, they reveal diversity of entry into, experience of and movement through sex work events and relationship. They also show that one key feature for each person is the desire to connect with people and form relationships. While tragedy and sadness abound, what is also evident is a relentless capacity for creative and resilient responses in the face of adversity. It is the movement between vulnerability and resilience, and the place of relationships, as a mediating factor, that is writ large throughout the narratives.

### **Profile 1: Brian**

**Out of home and the suburbs. Into the city at 15.  
Homeless, confused and exploring a foreign world,  
He begins work at *The Wall*. He culls people onto a private list,  
And searches for pathways out of SMSW.**

### **Prologue**

At the beginning of the research, I had hopes that some of the participants would be quite keen to tell their life story. What I had not anticipated was the intensity of desire for storytelling. On occasions, the interview became a focal point for reflection and the development of new understandings of life.

Brian (20/22) wanted to be interviewed twice. At the time of the first interview, he was 20. After 80 minutes had elapsed, he requested that we stop the interview, offering to “do another one if you want” [12a(324)] but this was to occur at a later stage. The interview was a difficult process for Brian. While he was enthused about the prospect of recounting his

experiences and helping the researcher, he was also quite anxious, thoughtful, worried about what would come out in the conversation. In the end, he was overwhelmed by what he was saying. Notwithstanding all of these difficult emotions, and the confusion produced within him, he completed the first interview with a recognition that talking about his life experiences was as important for him as it was for my research:

I'm trying to pull it out of myself. It's weird. Like I said, like I said before, I've thought all this before but like, I don't think I've ever said it to anyone, and I've never really expressed it and I really need to, I think.

**Brian 12a(532)**

Sex work is a hidden phenomenon; it simply is not talked about very often, and when it is—by Brian—he is stretched beyond his comfort zone by the *thinking* and *talking*. Both interviews became a focal point for his thinking and reflection over a period of four years, charting in a tangible manner the path he had travelled since leaving home.

The second interview was carried out when he was 22. Brian kept in contact between and after the interviews. He returned again when he was 24 to read over the transcript just prior to entering a drug rehabilitation program. This was something he had been considering at the time of the second interview some two years earlier when he said: "I've been considering whether I should go detox at the moment but I don't think I really want to be institutionalised and I don't think I want to leave my life out here at the moment either" [12b(255)].

Brian had come to the city at an early age and found himself embroiled in its processes. He quickly became confused and unsure of his identity and place within the world. Some five years later, he left Sydney for a country rehabilitation program, with the specific intention of regaining clarity about himself, his relationships and his future. However, this is not where he began to tell his story during the interview.

## Beginnings

Brian left school when he was 15 and in Year 10. This coincided with his first exploration of the inner city of Sydney. When asked why he came to the inner city, he indicated that “it was problems with” himself. He “was having a lot of communication breakdown; problems with [his] father [be]cause he’s deaf. Well he’s partially deaf and he’s getting deafer, yeah, and [they] had a lot of communication breakdowns” [12a(47)]. When young people leave home prematurely and at an early age, it is often because of difficulties external to, but impacting on, the person, such as “family conflict, including family violence and abuse, family poverty and resulting stress ... unemployment ... state intervention and wardship, substance abuse and mental illness” (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1995, p. 37-38).

While poverty is normally associated with environmental factors such as the loss of income, food and shelter, Brian identifies relational poverty and isolation as two of the factors that pushed him to leave home. While he notes that this experience occurred at home, it also happened within the education system where he “was one of the, what’s the word for it, the rejects at school, so to say as well” [12a(51)]. Brian felt isolation within his school because, “a lot of the kids didn’t like” him. He “was actually going through a Christian phase then” and he thought that “a lot of the kids didn’t like that or something. I don’t know” [12a(59)].

The experience of distance from family and isolation at school led Brian to mount a number of protective and defensive responses, all of which could be said to be indicative of a capacity for adaptation in the face of adversity, but not necessarily positive in their outcome. It is notable that Brian crafts a positive point of reference out of what was an overwhelmingly negative experience at school:

I’ve always been like that anyway, from being a reject at school, like I had to put up with not being able to speak to anyone; not speaking to anyone and not having anyone around me. And I suppose I’ve adapted to that really easily or something.

**Brian 12a(376)**

Notwithstanding the negative sentiment that is repeated—“not speaking to anyone”—it focussed his attention on what was needed, while providing the impetus for his move into a completely unknown world where he sought that which was missing within his world. While he states that he “adapted ... really easily” to the hardship associated with mockery and isolation, given later events and the difficulty he experienced gaining stability, it is a limited or flawed adaptation that we see, even at this early stage. He was alone, and his way of coping was to flee, with no security, to the inner city. This was a place to which he kept returning in an exploratory fashion, as he indicated: “Like I said, I was a reject at school and I was pretty amazed to have some friends, so yeah. It was friends, you know” [12a(108-111)] that drew him to the inner city.

For Brian, the desire for friendship was a poignant and constant reference point: in its absence *and* as a desired experience, even within his world of origin:

People out at Ingleburn still don't like me for some reason. I mean, I've got friends out there now. Like, I suppose, I've always had friends, but like they're just, they're not really good friends. They're just people I grew up with and people that gave me a hard time when I was, yeah, I think I was a scapegoat or something for a lot of the kids' problems that were happening at home or something, you know.

**Brian 12a(111)**

The desire for friendship remained a positive constant imbued with expectations against which potential or actual friends were judged:

The few friends that I have got at the moment, that I kind of know, do know [about his SMSW]. I mean, you know, they don't really know everything but they kind of know my past or whatever and what I have done and they are not judgmental or yeah, segregate me for any reason at all, which is really good. Yeah, because like I said, some people could be really judgmental I suppose.

**Brian 12b(275)**

A core value or benchmark is that true friends are able to acknowledge and deal with the complexity of life without being judgemental. When a breach occurs in this core and sustaining experience, to which Brian clings, it causes significant hurt which is viewed as a betrayal. Healing is required:

I'm in the middle of a healing process because in the last six months, I was kind of betrayed by friends anyway. Not really. I've spoken to them since. There's an understanding there and I suppose, just because of the last six months, I was betrayed by people. I wasn't betrayed but I felt like I was and I was really hurt

**Brian 12a(384)**

In Ingleburn, some 60 minutes travel south west of Sydney, the core and sustaining experience of friendship was absent. However, because of its significance, it was a desire that could not be ignored. Ingleburn was not the place to be.

### **Departures and exposure**

Studies involving young people who become homeless indicate that even after the movement away from home begins, ties with family can remain strong and exercise a level of influence on behaviour (Milburn et al., 2005). Brian's transition from home to life beyond his family went on for some sixteen months to two years. It involved what Paradise (2001) has referred to as "heterogeneous dissolution processes" within his family, peer and other social contacts (p. 168): a gradual dissolving of connection across many areas of his life. This unfolding event produced a fluidity within his relationships, a tenuous connection with his world of origin and an availability to another world dominated by an awareness of "street capital" and the existence of a "street economy": a world into which he would be inducted and then commodified (Lankenau et al., 2005).

Brian travelled from the felt absence of significant relationships to the inner city and Eastern Suburbs of Sydney where he searched for a place to belong, a "home" and a "school" where he would finally be accepted. There, he discovered a fast-paced lifestyle, a disparate people, and a chaotic place that stimulated his mind and provided an almost instant friendship circle:

I went to some movie festival at Bondi Beach that had a whole heap of Australian movies. They were actually pretty good if I remember correctly. And um, I met this girl and a lot of her, she went, she grew up in Double Bay and a lot of her friends used to hang around here ... I suppose I just started hanging around with her friends, started hanging around this area, 'cause there used to be a pool hall on Oxford Street.

**Brian 12a(71)**

This new place, and new group of friends, formed the cradle of a rapidly unfolding life-change; it was his entry into a complex world mired by risky human experience:

... there was also in that same group, there were a couple of junkies that hung around the Cross and hung around *The Wall* and stuff like that. And I started, like they were, it was kind of a really a tight circle of friends and even those people were in the same group. Like, we always used to hang out together.

**Brian 12a(115)**

While there was excitement and the comfort associated with finding a “tight circle of friends”, this premature independence and an uncontrolled and unmediated exposure to a heterogeneous world brought with it a harsh and penniless lifestyle and “[be]cause [he] was on the streets, and finding it hard to live, [he] started working *The Wall*” [12a(115)]. This transition occurred when Brian was 15; while it sounds rapid in the re-telling his gradual exposure to this world extended over several months.

### **Beginning SMSW**

Brian began his involvement with SMSW around the same time as the government of New South Wales was conducting a commission of inquiry into corruption within the state police service (Wood, 1997a). The terms of reference for the royal commission were broadened during the inquiry to include an examination of the following: corrupt activity by any public office, organisation or individual that may support or encourage paedophile activity (including male prostitution); the competency of public institutions in protecting children “in care” from sexual abuse; the sufficiency of laws prohibiting paedophilia and sexual abuse; the effectiveness of the investigation and prosecution of offenders (Wood, 1997b, 1997c, 1997d). This was a significant contextual issue for any person frequenting *The Wall*, be they worker, potential sex work client or health and welfare agency. As Brian notes, “it’s really weird. I appeared on the scene and all these paedophiles were being sued” [12a(372)]. The intense and yet largely covert activity of the inquiry nonetheless had an impact on his initial reaction to and experience of SMSW. A degree of protection, or a limiting of harm, appeared to be present at the time of his induction at *The Wall*

and “because [he] was 15, a lot of the clients kind of didn’t want anything to do with [him]; didn’t want to really give [him] a hard time because they were scared anyway” [12a(372)]. As he states, “I remember my first job was really very easy actually. That’s kind of why it attracted me to it. It was like I was doing nothing and I got \$250 for it” [12a(372)]. And yet, while he has “lots of memories” of his time at *The Wall*, the individual experiences are “all a blur now” because he has “been doing it for so long now” [12a(400)].

Such was the supposedly positive nature of these early sex work events that the term “work” and the occupation descriptors “sex worker” or “prostitute” were not applied by Brian to his activity. As he indicated, “I remember in the beginning that I didn’t even classify myself as a prostitute until 12 months down the track” [12a(372)] when “someone said it to me or something and it was, like, ‘That’s what I am’. It was really strange” [12a(376)]. The task of giving a name to his activity and the way he was surviving was left to others.

There is a split in Brian’s thinking here about his involvement in SMSW. While his memories and reflections on these initial SMSW experiences is imbued with an air of quizzical innocence and excitement, there is limited understanding of the totality of the SMSW experience, an understandable position for a person of 15. Reflection on a greater body of SMSW experience made it clear what it meant for Brian to engage in SMSW. For him, it was “a big emotional head-fuck having to prostitute” [12a(170-175)] because “it’s just standing out at night watching all the cars go past and having to cop abuse from some people” [12a(227)]. As a result, he has had “lots of different experiences with different people that have just given [him] like shit, because they just think that they can, because they think that [he’s] a prostitute and they think that [he’s] scum of the earth or whatever, you know” [12a(291)]. In its totality, there is a palpable connection for Brian between prostitution and negative experiences. However, it is not only the clients in SMSW that ostracise Brian leaving him with the sense that he is “scum”. *The Wall* is a place with a history and some degree of notoriety: clients, other workers, people who live or work in the area, and aggressive passers-by are all part of creating the tenor of the SMSW experience.

There is clarity in Brian about the meaning and outcome of involvement with the city and SMSW. As we have seen, his understanding covers the raw experience of working *The Wall* but he also explores the activity, the relationships that occur and the difference between relationships in prostitution and those that are more personal. It is not easy for him to compartmentalise the various facets of the SMSW experience and all the different layers tend to blend and merge within a single set of sentences. The activity of SMSW is defined and then a psychological process central to the carrying out of that activity is outlined. As he indicates, “I suppose if it’s just a job, there’s a big emotional detachment there” [12a(195)]. The activity is defined as work and detachment is defined as a central psychological task in the experience. This activity is further defined, explored and developed when he draws a comparison between SMSW relationships and personal relationships:

There’s a difference between having sex with a guy my own age that I’m kind of attracted to, and there’s a difference between having sex with a guy who’s fucking three times my age; it’s for money, you know what I mean. There’s a big difference actually; a lot of emotional difference for one.

**Brian 12a(159)**

For Brian, SMSW largely involves sex with older men. It is about money and is not about attraction to the person with whom you are engaged. He holds disdain and contempt for those with whom he works—his clients—based on their age and the monetary context of their connection. On the other hand, personal relationships are about something completely different. So as he notes, “if it’s not a job, I have to; I’m trying to feel emotion for it. That’s the difference” [12a(195)]. The repeated mantra—“It’s a job”—which occurs eight times across both interviews, appears set in place to remind him that a rational and psychological barrier is necessary to the experience of SMSW. It is about a solid distinction between what is personal and what is work. The psychological barrier is a defensive structure, a coping mechanism. The presence of a structural barrier in his thinking is even more significant because of the permeability of the barrier that allows for the breaches to occur in his thinking and action, a position evident when he comments about SMSW in the form of a rhetorical statement: “if it’s just a job” [12a(195)].

The “if” implies an absence of certainty and the possibility of other ways of thinking about the people within sex work, a reality that becomes more evident when he shifts from one modality of sex work to another more palliative form of work — *private-list work*.

### From street-based MSW to private-list MSW

For Brian, and because of the “big head-fuck” [12a(227)] produced by involvement in SMSW, the negative emotional and physical experiences, and the lack of sufficient control over his MSW experience, he decided to remove himself from *The Wall*,

Because ... I just know it's not a healthy thing. There's a lot of people that are caught up in it that don't realise how much of a damaging thing it is or something I s'pose. I mean I s'pose they do but, I don't know, you don't, you try not to think about the damage that you're doing to yourself, I s'pose”

Brian [12b(287)].

Over time, Brian did realise and so took action. By doing so, he was able to avoid the abusive strangers and gain a greater level of control over his sex work experience. The move away from *The Wall* produced a positive outcome for Brian and he “noticed a big difference” in himself. He achieved “just a bit of a better self-esteem ... a bit more self-worth” [12b(179)].

While he removed himself from SMSW, there was no clear desire on Brian's part to extricate himself from MSW altogether. Thus, the creative response was to develop a private-list in male sex work (PMSW). As Brian indicates, in PMSW, “I've got these clients that I don't even have to go up *The Wall* to see” [12a(227)]. These were clients from *The Wall* with whom he was able to ingratiate himself enough to be able to quarantine them from *The Wall* and onto a private list. They became his regular clients, the backbone of his MSW experience.

Even in PMSW, there are parameters, rules and a clear understanding of the frequency, purpose and meaning of the sex work practices. To begin with, he sees these regular clients,

... probably, two or three times a week, just because, like, when I pay my rent, that's all of my dole cheque. Then that's basically all of my dole cheque, you know. Like, I try and put all of my dole on my rent and so, that's the only way I can really eat or have drugs or have anything else. I know it's really bad but like, it's just the way it is at the moment.

Brian 12a(227)

The move to PMSW was driven by need—partly material and partly lifestyle—and produced stronger boundaries and clarity of purpose. PMSW occurred “two or three times a week” and was for “food and drugs”. However, a moral judgement is still imposed by Brian on the experience. It is regarded as “bad”. And yet, it is regarded as a necessity and essential to his survival. While sex work is regarded as a necessity, Brian is able to modify the experience in order to make it more acceptable even while he retains reservations. To be at *The Wall* is to engage in a public social activity characterised by many as deviant; for Brian, it is dangerous and repugnant. There is an understanding of both realities and also of the difference between SMSW and PMSW:

I think so. I mean it's a bit more: I can justify it and be a bit. I don't know, like it's just better than standing out on the street and having people drive past and yell criticism at you and stuff. It's just a bit easier being able to ring someone up if you know what I mean. It means I am not putting myself out and standing out on the street for four hours, if you know what I mean.

Brian 12b(72-75)

By transposing the sex work experience into another environment—by generating a private list and therefore removing himself from *The Wall* with all it implies—he maintains a financial support base for his lifestyle but avoids the lack of control so much a part of his experience of *The Wall*.

Brian continued to speak about the strategy of “emotional detachment” raised earlier in this chapter and articulates, with clarity, how he wants these relationships to operate in his desire to recreate and reframe the experience of SMSW:

Brian: There's some guys that actually want to do the whole hug you, kiss you, lovey, dovey thing. And then there's some guys that I suppose, in a way, they're really detached from their own sexes themselves. And they don't really get into the whole love thing themselves. They don't get into the whole touchy, touchy thing themselves.

DL: What do you prefer?

Brian: I suppose, for the job, not to, because that's another thing with the emotional detachment, that um, that I, if it's a client, like, it's a client. I don't see it as a relationship or anything. If it's a

relationship, there's supposed to be something there, you know, and like, I don't know: too many questions.

Brian 12a(491-496)

There is a distinction between his sexual experiences in prostitution and those in his private life. At a definitional level, sex work for Brian does not involve a relationship and clients are distanced by emotional detachment and physical distance. On the other hand, sexual contact at a personal level is set within the context of a relationship; emotional attachment and physical intimacy exist within this context because “if it's a relationship, there's supposed to be something there” [12a(496)]. Also notable is Brian's final comment—“I don't know, too many questions”—a line repeated many times throughout the interview and an indicator of the sensitivity in the area being discussed at that moment. It was Brian's way of trying to contain or limit the discussion and even move on. Throughout the interviews, when I approached an issue at a depth that appeared threatening or confusing, there was a clear cue indicating his discomfort and a desire to move on. It was either a comment from Brian that there were “too many questions” (as in this current situation) or he would say, “next question!” in a light and bouncy manner, using humour to move us out of a troubling area. Occasionally, he would explicitly state that he wished to move on, but this was rare and the oblique *cue* was the norm.

### **PMSW and the porosity of boundaries**

In Brian's descriptions of prostitution, he *pushes* the notion that there is clarity and firmness, even rigidity, about the boundary between worker and client. His activity is “prostitution and it's a complete emotional detachment for myself, a lot of the time” [12a(179)]. This is most evident in SMSW but is nonetheless present with PMSW; having said that, there are differences between SMSW and PMSW. Sex at *The Wall* was defined as prostitution. Thus, a “*complete* emotional detachment” is a strategy or a necessity in this activity. The phrase “*a lot of the time*” raises questions about the security of the clarity he pushes in respect of sex and sex work, and of his strategy of distance and disconnection. Although he strives for rigidity in his strategy

of detachment, there is also a level of porosity in his boundaries such that the desired and necessary detachment and clear definition of sex work isn't always present:

I mean, I have a couple of clients that I've known for a few years now and you know, like I'm actually, there's more than just a job there. There's actually, I know them pretty well, and, you know. I suppose, like, they know me as a person as well, which is a bit spun out because they picked me up from *The Wall*, you know what I mean. I don't know, I can't even remember what you asked me just then.

**Brian 12a(179)**

It is a confusing—"spun out"—experience for Brian and one that scatters his thinking: "I can't even remember what you asked me just then". He wants to be very clear and steadfast about enforcing the emotional and physical boundaries that are acutely significant to his survival, but they are sometimes porous boundaries and this is particularly the case in PMSW as "there's more than just a job there".

Something new is created through a relaxing of the boundaries. In some ways, and with some people, these sex work connections gain personal significance. As he noted in quiet tones: "I know them pretty well ... they know me as a person" [12a(179)]. Although this is confusing for Brian, they are irresistible connections because they tap into his expressed fundamental need for relationships and material support. Within PMSW, there is a degree of mutuality: a sharing of knowledge about self, and a level of connectivity that takes the encounter with these clients beyond disengaged mechanistic sex. While a porosity of boundaries in SMSW can produce negative outcomes, and even be dangerous, within PMSW, it produces a different set of experiences. There is a fluidity and porosity to the boundaries in PMSW. It is also a mode of MSW that produces a greater sense of ease, comfort, and control for Brian.

### **Aspects of PMSW**

The movement from *The Wall* to PMSW appeared to mark an important development in Brian's understanding and experience of MSW. While MSW still contains the same air of necessity, there are also differences, one of which is that Brian had fewer clients. In fact, "I've got

two regulars that I see and I probably see one of them one week and then the other the next week” [12b(395)]. The shift from SMSW to PMSW brought with it a change in the sexual experiences within MSW. The activity was largely passive, that is, “they give me a head job” [12b(399)] and as such, he does not “have to do much, that’s why [he] kind of, that’s why [he is] okay with regularly seeing them because it’s quite an easy job” [12b(403)]. At *The Wall*, control over who became a client was more difficult, with on the spot assessment carried out in haste, in fear, and under the darkness of the night. There was also less choice in the sexual practices he engaged in, because of the chaos of the environment and the engagement process with clients. In SMSW, there are limited safeguards against danger and unpalatable or unwanted sexual experiences. In PMSW, Brian was able to vet and manage client contact which allowed for a certain crafting of the sexual experience.

Control over process and experience in MSW was not the only difference between SMSW and PMSW. Connectedness and attachment within these PMSW contacts was also a key area of development:

I think that the people that I see regularly, I kind of have some sort of, not trust but I s’pose, it’s kind of a trust, because like, I wouldn’t go keep seeing them regularly if they treated me like shit, so to say, or I s’pose in a way there is, like, seeing someone every sort of couple of weeks or something, I’m not quite sure. I mean you know, I totally live my own life and they have their own lives.

**Brian 12b(79)**

A crucial distinction between SMSW and PMSW is that the clients Brian has chosen do not treat him “like shit” and hence, ongoing contact becomes a viable and sustainable option. Brian structured less work time in PMSW than in SMSW and the emphasis for Brian was on maintaining a separation of lives. Having said that, the impression of strict boundaries and separate lives was again confounded by other movements and activities that occurred with his PMSW clients:

DL: Do you see them outside of the job?

Brian: Not really: except for maybe sitting down and sharing a joint and having a chat, if you know what I mean.

DL: Is that important?

Brian: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, it is. I don't like the whole plastic superficial thing with sex. Really, it can become mechanical, if you know what I mean.

**Brian 12b(80-87)**

There were new descriptors that he created to describe his PMSW experience such as: “trust” “seeing them regularly”, “sharing a joint”, “having a chat”, “plastic”, “superficial”, and “mechanical”. These new descriptors provide some definition to the MSW experience that includes what he most desired, and what he most sought to avoid within the MSW contact.

The PMSW connections are different to those gained through SMSW. The connection is stronger, more equitable, more negotiated; and easier in terms of the actual sex work experience:

The clients that I see quite regularly are quite easy jobs: they don't take much to get off anyway. I know that I'm not putting myself in the vulnerable, as well. Like you know, just in a vulnerable spot because I think that's the real damaging thing: putting yourself in the vulnerable kind of situation and not knowing, I s'pose.

**Brian 12b(167)**

Perhaps more significant than the issues of strength of connection, equity, and negotiation, is that of personal vulnerability. At *The Wall*, the vulnerability was clear as standing there was likely to result in being abused by passers-by and clients, having sexual contact with unknown people, and enduring massive uncertainty through “not knowing” and fear. For Brian, such risks were untenable in the long term. Thus, PMSW was a primary strategy for moving forward within a context where he believed that sex work was imperative. As a part of that strategy, he placed limits on the potential for harm by exercising control over who entered his list of clients. He also placed limits on the number of clients. Finally, he filtered clients based on, among other things, their sexual and physical behaviour. By enacting this complex set of strategies—changing MSW mode, refining assessment and negotiation processes, and maintaining separation while gaining connection—the MSW experience was radically changed.

## Understanding PMSW clients

In shifting from SMSW to PMSW, a great deal changed for Brian. These changes include: his assessment skills, his control of the MSW environment, and his sexual behaviour with clients. Beyond these strategic and practical changes, other more fundamental shifts occurred, particularly in his thinking and understanding of himself within the MSW environment. In essence, there was a shift in his paradigm view of sex work relationships. As a result of him achieving a greater level of control over his environment, new and different human relational experiences emerge and with these, new definitions regarding the reality of MSW. While his clients remain his clients, they are less alien than the clients in SMSW, and so what emerges is a different perspective on them:

I mean, all the clients that I see, they're just people as well. You know like, that's another thing I've got to always try and remember, that they're just people. You know, they've got money that they've obviously worked for or they've fuckin' whatever, however they've gotten their money, they just, they're just people, like. I can't really judge them for fuckin' picking up a prostitute because prostitutes are so fuckin' old. Prostitution's one of the oldest fuckin' sources of employment in time, you know, really.

**Brian 12a(279)**

His judgements about his clients have changed. This appears to arise out of his altered sex work experiences, and this is caused, in part, by the changes he was able to create within the MSW environment — people, process and style of sex work. The shift from SMSW to PMSW also produces radical movements in his thinking, especially in the way he perceives himself in relation to his clients:

I don't like to judge people. Like I could really judge myself and I could really, really downgrade myself within myself but I don't want to. Like I could really, really judge people I do jobs with but I don't want to 'cause they're just as bad as me being the prostitute, you know. Simple as that: next question.

**Brian 12a(300)**

There is an awareness of the flaws that exist in both parties. Both could be harshly judged because of these flaws. However, because of a new sex work environment, within which he sees very different clients, there is a new awareness of the similarity between himself and his clients.

Because of this similarity between worker and client, disparagement of the *other* would inevitably lead to self-deprecation, and this is not an experience he desires.

### The experience of self

In spite of his desire to avoid being harmed, Brian spoke about his experience of feeling confused, and also wounded, in and by life. The first of those recollections was in relation to school where his sense of isolation at home was compounded by a relentless experience of being bullied. However, the sense of being confused was crystallised in his reflections on himself:

I don't know, like, if I could. I'd really like to say that, like I'm straight, but then I can't say that I am. You know what I mean? I don't think anyway. But then, I'm not gay either because I like girls too much. You know what I mean.

Brian 12a(155)

The experience of developing a sense of self—of attempting to carve out a direction in respect of identity—was influenced by his involvement in sex work:

I suppose I had a big identity crisis for a few years there, trying to work out, not thinking that I was gay and not thinking that I was bi or anything but, just like, the fact that I'd worked *The Wall* for so long and never been with a guy.

Brian 12a(171)

There is no consideration by Brian of a direct causation here—that is, involvement in SMSW led to a homosexual orientation, or at least confusion—as the language is not that strong. The experience cannot be simplistically framed. However, the question of sexual orientation arises, with a greater urgency, because of the concrete experience of SMSW and PMSW, and not through sex with men within a private relationship. His 12 months of sex work at *The Wall* was framed as a negative experience, and thus, this can be dismissed as an aberration. The question of orientation emerges because of two other experiences. First, after leaving *The Wall*, he developed a private list of clients. In other words, what may have been a necessity (*The Wall*) in the beginning then became a choice (PMSW). Second, the sex work experiences were situated within the broader context of exploration and experimentation. He developed friendships with clients,

and there were some experiences of sexual satisfaction. This confusion or indecision is confirmed by the porosity of his boundaries so evident in the experience of PMSW.

This confusion appeared within both interviews with Brian. Along with the confusion was a level of discomfort and an attempt at false closure on the issue when he indicates that: "I'm a freak. I don't stereotype myself. I'm a freak!" [12a(135)]. This was more of a throw-off line. It was an attempt to push for closure on the topic and then move on. It did not appear as a serious attempt at opening up and exploring what, for him, was a difficult and painful issue. Beyond the confusion regarding identity, and the very real sense that this is a difficult topic to explore, it appeared that being involved with MSW has had an impact on his experience of sex:

Sex is just sex to me these days as well; that's another thing, I suppose. I don't know, I suppose just being a prostitute, I've really damaged my sex and I suppose sex with any guy, I suppose ...

**Brian 12a(183)**

This comment provides insight into the issue of confusion of sexual identity. While he is attracted to women, MSW has "damaged" his sexual intimacy experiences "with any guy" and so resolving the conflicts he has within his identity become extremely difficult for Brian. The damage to self is brought about via a repetitive process, as he indicates: "just the fact that I've had to detach myself so many times" [12a(219)]. This *repetitive detachment* is the coping mechanism that allows him to perform MSW in its various forms. However, while it allows for longitudinal involvement in MSW, it also had consequences, one of which was "an identity crisis" that continued "for such a long time over whether [he] was gay or straight" [12a(219)]. It is an experience that concerns Brian a great deal and, as he indicates, "I've spoken to other prostitutes about this. It does do something to your sex drive and your sex life. It really does. It damages it. I don't know how to explain it" [12a(219)]. Despite the openness and the ability to consult with others over such a sensitive and central issue, the confusion continues and an explanation is impossible to find.

The “damage” of which Brian speaks goes beyond a mechanistic level of damage. It moves into the psychological realm:

I don't know, you don't, you try not to think about the damage that you're doing to yourself, I s'pose. I was, because it really does something to your self-worth as well and I think that I was just sick and tired of feeling shit about myself. I just wanted to move on, because I don't know, I could be so much more unhealthy in my head, hey, and I just don't want to be there. Because I don't know. I could be a really angry person if I wanted to. But go on, next question?

**Brian 12b(287)**

His sense of “self-worth” is affected. He is sick, tired, and feels “shit” about himself and, as a consequence, becomes aware of how he is mentally unhealthy and, most significantly, how he could become more unhealthy. The focal point and perhaps clearest indicator of a lack of health for Brian is the anger which resides within him that he fears may increase if he were to continue in SMSW. It is not really a case of “could” in relation to anger: he is angry.

In the second research interview with Brian (two years after the first), the “damaged sex” phenomenon was again mentioned. It was connected with a new and partially clarifying concept — that of violation:

Just the whole, we talked about it the last time, detaching from yourself and I don't know, it's not a healthy thing to do that, I don't think. I think, I don't know the whole working thing is just a real head fuck, if you know what I mean .... It's very, I don't know what the word for it is. Damaging is the only word that I can think of because it's violation. I mean it's not even violation but there is a violation or something.

**Brian 12b(154, 163)**

While detachment may well be a necessary aspect of sex work for Brian, he again articulates clearly that this is not a “healthy thing to do”. What was different some two years after our first interview was that the notion of detachment was refined. Previously, it was simply noted as detachment and the presumption was that the activity of MSW, in any mode, necessitated a detachment *from* the client and the experience. What is clarified here is that the detachment is *from* self rather than from the client. It is a very different strategy. As sex work is “just a real head fuck”, detachment is about removing oneself from a connection to that experience, for to remain present with such a “head fuck” would produce even more confusion and psychological angst.

Sex work damages because it is violating for Brian and the consequence is that he is an angry man.

There is a distinction that Brian makes that clarifies his strategy for coping with lengthy and varied involvement with MSW. It involves the distinction between denial and detachment. For Brian, “detachment is healthy but denial is not” [12b(43)]. Detachment is about a breaking away from self, and experience, while acknowledging that the experience exists. As he indicates, “it’s just detaching myself from that part of reality” [12b(47)]. Denial is another less healthy strategy to which he is inclined because “[he] can so easily deny it and that’s not good” [12b(47)]. His conclusion is that while denial is unhealthy, “detachment is a healthy reaction” [12b(47)]. So, denial is a refusal to acknowledge the existence of a given reality—in this case Brian’s involvement in sex work—whereas detachment, used as a strategy, implies that Brian acknowledges that the phenomenon exists. This means that he is involved in MSW, but chooses, or at least attempts, to compartmentalise the experience away from himself. He takes this approach so that it does not confront or disturb his sense of self, or the equilibrium, that he seeks to maintain in his everyday existence. It is questionable whether such an approach works, and his desire and attempts at detachment may well be the cause of his ongoing confusion — a prolonging of a reality that cannot be sustained by Brian.

### **Barriers, realisations, change**

There are other processes of detachment, denial, and coping that are a part of the MSW scene. The use of illicit substances such as cannabis, methamphetamines, cocaine and heroin is one of a number of experiences within MSW (Minichiello et al., 2003; Morse et al., 1992; Pedersen & Hegna, 2003). It is a form of self-medication. Brian engaged in substance use with both peers and clients, although he is critical of substance use at *The Wall*. As he put it,

I don't go up to *The Wall* that much any more because *The Wall* is just dead and the people are sad ... they're just so involved in their own little world and so caught up in drugs or their own little reality and it's kind of sad. It's not a happy thing to watch if you know what I mean

**Brian 12b(56, 59)**

Substance use is connected with sadness. Being stuck in a narrow constraining reality is also connected with sadness.

While his first use of substances predated his involvement with sex work, during the early stage of his time at *The Wall*, he attempted to avoid the use of illicit drugs because, even at that point in time, he could see negative side-effects from the use of substances. This was particularly true with the use of heroin:

It was really strange and I don't know. I suppose in the beginning I was trying not to, like, because the people that I'd first hung out with, they were really badly on the smack. I promised myself right in the beginning that I was never going to do heroin and stuff and I was trying not to associate with them too much and I was trying to be very, um, trying not to associate with people too much.

**Brian 12a(376)**

Notwithstanding Brian's efforts to abstain from substance use, heroin and other drug use was strongly connected with the SMSW environment for him. His involvement in MSW was regulated, at least to some extent, by his need for, and use of, illicit drugs. As he indicated, "I was trying, because I was supporting my habit with working back then as well. Like I suppose, because I gave up fuckin' heroin, I really didn't need to work, you know" [12a(376)]. The connection between MSW and substance use appears as a frustration for Brian who experiences confusion regarding his continued use of illicit substances:

To be honest, I'm a bit over drugs at the moment but, I don't know, for some reason I keep taking them. I think that's, it's not split personality but I just don't know. I know that the drugs are really bad but for some reason I keep taking them. I don't know, I don't know how to deal with that. I don't think it is split personality but who knows, but the drugs are just very controlling. That's what it is and I don't know, I don't know why I keep taking speed; it sends me round in circles.

**Brian 12b(255)**

The process and impact of Brian's involvement with substance abuse is evident. It controls his life, creates a generalised confusion, and leaves him struggling to develop an understanding of

why he engages in an activity that he understands harms and maintains him in MSW. His use of drugs sends him “round in circles”.

While there is confusion regarding the motivation for involvement with drugs, there is a level of certainty about his desire to change and move forward:

I mean, I think, the last eight months has probably been really good. Like better than I have been in the last probably six years really and I just feel, like I've really grown a bit and I'm not letting my life rule, not letting drugs rule me for one.

**Brian 12b(183)**

While he has no desire to have “drugs rule” him, he can only say that he has “grown a bit”. Six years is a long time to be embroiled in sex work and drug use. Although his confidence is not strong, change is clearly on the agenda:

I just don't think it's me any more. I think in the time that I was working *The Wall*, I think that I caused my mind and my sexuality some real damage and I'm a bit sick and tired, like, you can only damage something so much and then, it's beyond repair, if you know what I mean.

**Brian 12b(119)**

There is a tiredness and a recognition that there are, and will continue to be, consequences for involvement in both sex work and drug use. However, he is “really over it, you know, trying to move on and stuff and it's kind of hard” [12b(112-115)]. There is a realisation that change is necessary because the experiences he has put himself through, particularly in SMSW and the connected substance use, have caused him harm. He also realises that the “repair” of “damage” of self may not always be a possibility; but change is “hard”. The difficult question is how to create another life, an alternative pathway forward, and a corollary question is what relationships he needs to establish and maintain in order to secure an alternative pathway.

### **Other people, other strategies**

Detachment from self and others was not the only method by which Brian survived. In the main, MSW in any modality can be a solitary experience. However, relationships do occur in the lives of males engaged in SMSW and PMSW. Relationships are attempted, people do come

and go, and conclusions are reached about one's capacity for relationship. Brian's conclusion about male to male relationships was that he has "never really been able to hold a relationship with a guy" but he has "kind of had flings that haven't really worked" [12a(147)]. He has "tried to play the gay role but it just doesn't work sometimes, you know what I mean" [12a(163)]. When I tried to deepen his response, a very direct instruction was forthcoming: "I'm not even going to go into those relationships" [12a(167)]. We didn't explore his private sexual relationships beyond his comment that, "the fact that [he'd] worked *The Wall* for so long and never been with a guy: [He] just wanted to have that experience" [12a(171)]. His comment appears to contain a desire for clarification and verification; how can I make sense of my sexual experiences with men if I don't explore them outside the context of SMSW? And yet, and as he noted, that seems impossible because longitudinal MSW has damaged that possibility.

His relationships with women have been significantly different and have progressed further than any relationship he has begun with another male: "the girl relationships that I've been in have worked out a lot better. The last relationship I was in was with a girl and it was for two years" [12a(147)]. They are relationships that involve different activities, varying psychological states and a myriad outcomes: some positive, others negative. One such negative outcome was his infection with hepatitis C:

One girl I was with, like we, it was with "Susan", and we were with another girl and we were doing all these blood-drinking rituals and stuff like that. I think that's how I got it actually .... It was kind of stupid but that's fuckin' cocaine for you.

**Brian 12a(467)**

While risk-taking behaviour is a part of the MSW scene, this activity has another more seriously negative overtone: experimentation to the point where it contains a level of carelessness about life. At least at the point of this retelling of the story, there appeared to be an absence of insight about the dangers involved in this type of ritual or any other motive beyond experimentation with cocaine.

Susan, his long-standing partner, was also involved with sex work. Beyond the cocaine-induced destructive behaviour in which they both engaged, there were other ways in which she and Brian connected and other more positive outcomes from their contact with each other.

I suppose, like because one of the girls I was with when I was working, she was working as well. Like, we, me and her were both working at night and when we slept together, like later on that night, I suppose it was kind of a cleansing thing almost as well because she needed it as well. She needed love, 'cause she needed to detach herself from that guy she was doing a job with at the time as well, you know, and I suppose, it was a cleansing thing or healing thing for me because I had to detach myself and then I was having sex with someone that I was really in love with, you know.

**Brian 12a(211)**

While physical and emotional detachment were developed by Brian as a way of coping with MSW, the contact with Susan saw another dynamic develop. Physical detachment with a client produces detachment on a grand scale (from self and other). Intimacy with, or attachment to, a person with whom Brian “was really in love” produced a grand reattachment to self and other. While this reattachment is focussed on significant others, it is nonetheless an important development in his thinking. Further, not only is this relational experience “cleansing”, it also has the capacity to be reparative at a psychological level (Lewis, 2000).

There is another cleansing or reparative ritual for Brian that also breaks the connection with his clients—that of masturbation—which after sex work is a,

... kind of cleansing myself, I think. I think that cumming for someone; it's not that I particularly even want to cum. It's kind of, I don't know, it doesn't make me feel dirty but it kind of does. I try not to let anything make me feel dirty any more. I try to not think about it like that. I try to think a different way, to look at it, if you know what I mean. It just feels like someone has taken part of me or something and I don't know, it's [masturbation] just kind of a cleansing thing and that's kind of the way that I deal with it. Which, I don't know, I s'pose it's probably kind of a normal thing for prostitutes.

**Brian 12b(419)**

While it is confusing and difficult for him to discuss, for Brian there is no real desire to “cum” for a client because it feels, for him, “like someone has taken part of me” — a situation with which he is also uncomfortable. So he attempts to have his own sexual experience where he produces an orgasm, and ejaculates for himself, in the hope that this will also cleanse him of the MSW experience, and draw a line between experiences. However, this second form of cleansing

ritual becomes contaminated by a moral judgement he applies to his actions. Even though he tries to reframe the experience, he is caught with the right/wrong dilemma:

I think that is, I don't know. It's a big thing, masturbation, that it's wrong. But I don't think there is anything wrong with it. I think it's a really, um, what's the word for it? It takes a lot to be comfortable with yourself and being able to stimulate yourself and I don't know; there's a lot to it.

Brian 12b(419)

It takes effort to reconnect with self and be comfortable. Masturbation was one method by which Brian attempted this reconnection, notwithstanding the negative moral character attached to it for him. The outcome from this very personal experience—that he hopes is cleansing—is also clear. For Brian, masturbation “kind of consumes me from my last job. Next question? Can we get off that topic?” [12b(419)]. Masturbation “consumes” the MSW experience and reinstates him as a separate entity, away from the MSW experience and his clients. However, he has doubts about this strategy because “it might be even more fuckin’ dirty” than MSW [12b(419)]. The mere thought of this confusion seems to scramble his thinking. So we finished our discussion where we began: reconnecting is difficult, and where the reconnection involves discussion of intimate experiences to which a negative flavour is attached, disconnection is again sought. For Brian, it is not a *denial* of the experience but it is a detachment. It is a moving away from the thought, from the other, and mostly from the experience, but still within the context of a desire for reattachment.

Reattaching or reconnecting with people is a confronting and difficult series of tasks. Where the connection deals with matters of personal importance that are far from clear or comfortable, then the reattachment or connection is difficult and even painful. While this was evident during both interviews, during the second interview, Brian was able to provide some understanding of the cause of his discomfort:

Just having, I don't know. It's not having to talk about it but just trying to, because I don't know, I don't really deal with this. I mean I do, you know, it's part of me, but I don't really deal with this kind of stuff in my every day to day life, if you know what I mean, and to be questioned about it and, I don't know, I've just got to delve into my mind or something.

Brian 12b(39)

The “delving” into his mind—into the depth of an experience—is a demanding or confronting task that is not an everyday practice for Brian; it causes confusion and a desire to detach again. So connecting with the aim of experiencing a cleansing effect is not about delving in-depth into sensitive life experiences, as this may cause distress and further detachment. Reconnecting must involve another way.

Positive and growth-producing connections come about because of an understanding that exists between the parties arising out of their common human experience. Here, I am not referring to the common human experience in the broadest sense, but that which is shared at a sub-cultural level. This is what invariably allows outsiders and foreigners to connect within their common frame of reference with the minimum exchange of actual detail:

It’s really strange. Um, OK, I may as well say this. Susan was going out with this guy that was, I don’t know, he was a lot older and because, I don’t know, she had this complex that no one else would understand and no one else would be able to understand. And then I came along and I’d been with a fuckin’ thousand, well, not a thousand, that’s an over exaggeration, but I’ve been with a lot of older guys. Like you know, for some reason, I could understand.

**Brian 12a(432)**

There was a connection point around their common sub-cultural human experience. It was a largely unspoken connection, where the acknowledged common experience was the essence of what allowed for attachment rather than detachment. As Brian indicated, he could “understand what she was going through. I could understand her whole relationship with an older guy” [12a(436)].

While connections to self and others away from MSW are imperative to Brian, “sometimes it’s easier to be alone” [12a(380)]. However, “you can’t spend all your time alone because too much goes through my head” [12a(380)]. While the thoughts that go through his head are diverse and complex, he points to one particular thought-line that worries him the most. It is his concern that “there’s a lot of people out there who would judge me for what I’ve done or what I am at the moment” [12a(380)]. It is a feeling that threatens his strategy of discovering pathways forward through connectedness. Thus, for Brian, maintaining distance as a relational

strategy is, at times, necessary because of a fear that he will be judged. However, remaining totally single is also problematic because to be alone is to remain with one's thoughts, and this too is problematic for Brian. Being single, while having a close and intimate friendship connection with Susan, creates a positive sensation in Brian. This sensation endures as long as he can maintain the intimacy coupled with the distance, and the individuality coupled with attachment.

And I am. It's not that it's scary but I just don't want it. I don't know; I'm just happy being single, if you know what I mean. I s'pose that might have to do with working because, I don't know. Next question, I wasn't going anywhere with that. I'm doing all right, aren't I?

**Brian 12b(243)**

Another factor arises in his mind about the need for distance: that MSW has had an impact on his capacity to remain connected with another person at a close and intimate level. However, at the time of the interview, he cannot take this insight very far. He then requires reassurance that he is "doing all right" in the interview.

There are other types of relationship in Brian's life. People become involved, they hold some significance, and they are able to approach and remain for some time. "People in [his] art course" [12b(223)] are close to Brian. However, as Brian is constantly concerned about being judged, because of his history of rejection and involvement in MSW, "it's not like [he] can tell them" [12b(275)] about his involvement in sex work. However, those who do understand draw close and, after a period where some assessment is made, are allowed to be involved. Counsellors are a part of this equation:

I feel Lucinda [current counsellor] is quite close to me at the moment even though I only see her once a week. Yeah, I think our relationship is getting a bit healthier or a bit, I don't know, there was lots of boundaries that I had to get through at the beginning when Juan [former counsellor] left and I was just finding it a bit hard to begin with but I think I've broken them down or slowly am, if you know what I mean.

**Brian 12b(223)**

There are many differences for Brian between an intimate relationship and one he establishes with his counsellor. What is notable about a relationship with a partner is that there is a request for intimacy, the boundaries of which are developing and therefore unknown. Within this context, there is a great need for separation and distance as a strategy for survival. In the

counselling relationship, where there are clearly defined boundaries and a structured level of connection and distance, there is an active strategy aimed at breaking down the barriers to greater connection. There is ambivalence in both relationships. In one, the uncertainty and the possibility of greater intimacy and commitment—both definitional to a partner relationship—are crucial factors in Brian's need for distance. In the other, the struggle is about breaking down barriers to a different type of intimacy that he hopes will be therapeutically cleansing.

Brian has criteria for all relationships, and these are used to judge whether the connection will happen or not, the degree of disclosure, and the degree to which the connection is sustained:

I was talking to the student counsellor there and like I was just talking to her, I kind of opened up about working and stuff to her and she was all right with it because she was saying that she worked with some sex workers when she was overseas like a couple of years ago or something and she said she was going to look into getting some, into finding a counsellor for sex workers and I got referred to you.

**Brian 12b(502)**

The presence of understanding and the absence of judgement are clear criteria for decisions on whether people become close or are held at a distance. Notwithstanding her own experience, Susan did not understand his experience. The connection with the student counsellor occurred because, out of her own experience of the subculture, she understood. The relationships with Lucinda (his counsellor) worked because she wanted to understand. Brian's use of understanding and judgement as criteria for friendship allows him to filter relationships and create the type of experiences that he needs and wants:

... for example the people in my art course, it's not like I can tell them but then the few friends that I have got at the moment that I kind of know, [they] do know. I mean you know, they don't really know everything but they kind of know my past or whatever and what I have done and they're not judgmental or yeah, segregate me for any reason at all, which is really good. Yeah, because like I said, some people could be really judgmental I suppose.

**Brian 12b(275)**

Brian expressed an acute desire to connect, and relate, to people. In the end, three criteria mattered most in his thinking about these actual and potential relationships: *understanding* is what is being sought; *judgement* is what is being avoided; and *segregation* is an outcome experience

not to be endured. A range of strategies are employed in this area by Brian: filtering, regulating contact, creating distance, avoiding too much commitment, and learning how to cleanse self. These were the relational strategies developed to ensure his survival within his relational world. In the end, there is another factor that determines progression in relationships, and that is his experience of MSW. It has a stated negative influence and results in Brian being hesitant about relating at a close and sustained level. The exception to the rule is where the boundaries within those relationships regulate his unguarded exposure to potential harm and an over-exposure to intimacy. The past impacts on the future but does not quell the desire to create a future.

### **Crafting a future**

Brian notes, with some pride, that there have been periods since he was 15 where MSW was not an activity in which he engaged. As he indicated, “in the last five years, I’ve lived like a couple of different lifestyles as well. I haven’t been a prostitute the whole time you know. For a while there, I was living in a nice place in Newtown. Yeah, we had it really going off and it was really, really fun” [12a(404)]. And he has dreams of what he would like to do in the future. He wants to be a counsellor. However, as he added, “I’ve got a lot of stuff that I have to work through within myself before I can do that” [12b(383)]. One of the things that acts as a barrier to Brian crafting a future is that he has not “really got any expectations on life; [he] think[s] its best not to ... because life can change from day to day” [12b(383)].

Notwithstanding the uncertainty, efforts are made to bring about a change in direction and therefore a future. There is a significant shift in lifestyle associated with his attempts to change and carve out a future:

It's just trying to occupy my mind I think because like I just said, I hadn't done anything for a long time and it was really even weird just getting into the cycle of waking up at 9.30 in the morning and coming into the city and stuff, three days a week. The first couple of weeks it was a bit strange because I just hadn't done that since I was at school. I mean, I s'pose I was doing the butchering course you know two years ago and working for a little bit then but I don't know, it just wasn't like what I'm doing now. I'm actually really enjoying it because, I don't know, the people in the class are really good and the teachers are really good.

**Brian 12b(502)**

While planning is important and a task he takes on, thinking must be regulated so that the task does not become overwhelming. Activity is what helps him to regulate his thinking because “too much goes through my head” [12b(380)]. This structuring of time and energy—“just having the structure in my life”—occurs through his course and other structures, such as his time in counselling, and he can see the benefits. However, it is more than simply structure, as “having a commitment and actually doing something with [his] life” is “really good because for so long [he] hadn't done anything and just went stagnant” [12b(495)]. Ultimately, this structure and commitment is an effort at “definitely trying to move on” [12b(502)].

The story of Brian is about raw experience and chaos in thinking. It is about the regulation of that experience and thinking. While there are pitfalls and mistakes, he develops a quasi-regulatory environment — of boundaries, strategies and defences. While somewhat porous and malleable, this regulated environment is nonetheless capable of maintaining some order and direction, albeit within what, for Brian, is an anxious world. Other males engaged in street-based sex work have less opportunity for regulating their personal and social environment because of the power or force of the people who inhabit their world. That is a major theme within the life of Nick, the only participant who was under 18 at the time of his interview.

## **Profile 2: Nick**

**Lured away from home at twelve,  
Led into the inner city, tutored by his brother, guided by violence,  
He engages in connivance and survival sex, and then SMSW.  
He discovered connections that matter in sex work.**

### **Prologue**

As Nick was 17 at the time he participated in the research, I was required by the university ethics committee to gain both his and a parent's informed consent. While the interview took place in the city, gaining parental consent meant visiting Nick's mother. It was the only contact with a parent I had during the research. Nick and his brother were both involved in SMSW. What surprised me about the experience of visiting Nick and his mother was there was no apparent emotional or practical demarcation being formed by either party between this and other life experiences. Involvement in SMSW appeared to be regarded as a normal aspect of life.

Nick and his family lived an hour's drive south-west of the city. They lived in a government housing estate with poor transport and limited services in close proximity. The house was small, tidy, but smoke filled. The walls were stained yellow by nicotine and tar. Photos of the boys, and of their mother, were evident around the home. Nick's brother, Phil (who was also approached regarding this research but was in gaol during the research period), is nine years his senior. Phil also lived from time to time in the family home. Along with his mother and brother, a succession of his mother's partners have also lived in the home.

## The experience of home

Nick was eager to provide details about his home and his family but it was only when he began to speak about his grandfather that any emotion arose for him. His mother was a key person in his life but any discussion of his mother was tempered by references to substance use:

From when I could remember, Mum was at the time a big pot head. From the age that I can remember from, which is about four. She was a pretty big pot head. [There was a] piss up every night basically.

Nick 23(123)

A succession of men moved in and out of his mother's life and this had an impact on all members of his family. It was a revolving door of men and violence:

Then she got a boyfriend. The day I turned 6 she got introduced to one of my Aunty Fran's friends, Vincent. Then they broke up. Then she went out with another bloke named Tom from when I was about seven till about nine. He used to bash her a lot and that.

Nick 23(123)

As the boys grew older, they responded to the violence perpetrated by their mother's various partners. However, while they were responding against the violence, it was also being idealised:

One day my big brother came around to visit Mum, just walked straight in the front door. Mum turned around and said, "Who the fuck are you?" and Neil turned around and started bashing Mum. Phil ripped off his shirt, smacked the living shit out of Neil, took him out into the front yard, kicked him all over the front yard. Never saw Neil again and then like Mum was still a massive pot head at the time.

Nick 23(123)

Nick described a change in his mother that was notable because it was marked by order and restraint:

Then about five years ago Mum gave up pot, gave up drinking, she still has her cigarettes though. She loves them, she can't give them up. She has a schooner every now and then and that's her limit. She won't go any further.

Nick 23(123)

While significant positive changes in his mother's lifestyle were noted by Nick, her relationships remained unstable. Men came and went. While part of that instability appeared to arise through the changing of partners, Nick's brother, often with the protection of his mother at heart,

nonetheless also appeared to contribute to a generalised chaos within the home and the neighbourhood:

I was 15 and Winston, I'm sure you'd know him, he came over and Phil was there with Winston and they walked in the front door, as they always do, don't knock just walk straight in, and Neil was belting into Mum. Winston grabbed Neil, threw him through the front window of the house, which is like a double window in length, double window in height. Then jumped through it himself, chasing Neil across like across Lennox Parade, through the flats. Neil jumped over the back fence of the flats, saw Phil coming from one direction, Winston coming from another, kept running.

Nick 23(123, 127)

Protection of important people is connected with rage, destruction of any order, property loss, and serious and negative consequences for all the people involved. While Phil's efforts began with good intentions, they ended in disaster:

At the end of this little paddock thing there's a highway and Winston just came out of nowhere and just went bang and just pushed him and the consequence of that? Neil had to learn how to tie his shoelaces again. Everything; he was basically a baby again but only in the mind. Then Phil got locked up once again for another three years and he only got out a couple of weeks ago, no, a couple of months ago but he went back in for a month and then came back out. Currently Winston is doing time for murder.

Nick 23(127)

It was a violent environment for a child, but this was not the first experience of violence and violation for Nick. During the period when his mother was involved with substance abuse—both drugs and alcohol—Nick was exposed to environments where supervision and care of him were diminished because of his mother's intoxicated state and the environment into which Nick was placed:

Nick: I got sexually assaulted once when I was younger.

DL: How old were you?

Nick: I was about four. We were up at the Railway Hotel in the little room at the side where kids used to be able to go into ... Mum was in the pub bit, you know, playing pokies and drinking, have a joint with a friend of hers out the back ...

Nick 23(523-527, 535)

The context of this disclosure seemed spontaneous and important. It came towards the end of the interview and arose when I asked Nick about his experience of homelessness and in particular, "Do you ever think of why that's happening?" He began his answer by saying that, "not being able to settle down in [his] own place is basically because [he is] like [his] father. [His]

father was a roamer. He used to disappear” [23(523)]. After describing how his father would roam the countryside and eventually return, relying on Nick’s mother to provide the means of his return, he went on to explore his own meandering around the country and his approach to his mother:

I say, “Mum, I’m in Queensland or Mum, I’m in Victoria” or, “Mum, I’m in Western Australia, I’m all right, don’t worry about me, I’m safe.” That puts her mind at ease to some extent. Yeah. I got sexually assaulted once when I was younger.

**Nick 23(523)**

Nick’s declaration of sexual abuse appeared out of context, juxtaposed as it was next to a description of his own independence and a desire to protect his mother. The connection is meaningful as it highlights his experience of abandonment and premature independence, both of which mark a great deal of his life:

This bloke came up and said would you like a game of pool because he’d seen me playing pool a little bit earlier on. I said, yeah sure. I distinctly remember one thing about him. He had a big Rottweiler dog bite on his left knee and it had a white bandage over it. After about two hours he sat down and spoke to my mum and that. They seemed to be getting along like old friends and that, you know. At about I think it was 9.15pm he said “Nick, your mum said you can come home to my place and have a bath and after your bath you’ve got to get changed and go to bed”. I said “but I haven’t got no clothes with me”. He’s gone, “that’s all right, you can sleep with nothing”.

**Nick 23(535)**

Although Nick and his brother attempt to protect his mother from harm, this is not what transpired for Nick. With his mother drunk for much of the time, he was left at age four years to manage and protect his own wellbeing:

DL: Where was your mum at this stage?

Nick: She was in the pub. I thought, oh well, mum and him have been speaking like they are old buddies so it’s all right, I suppose. I didn’t even think to ask my mum and I went to his place, took off my clothes and that, had a bath, came out, lay down on the bed, he laid down next to me which I thought was a bit odd but I was four so I didn’t really understand what the fuck was going on.

**Nick 23(536-539)**

As in previous situations, Nick watched how people behaved. He observed and attempted to make sense of his experience through his observations of others. However, rather than being actively guided and protected in this situation, he was effectively alone and required to make his

own decisions. He was easily led by the instructions of others into an unknown and unsafe environment where abuse is the outcome:

He sexually assaulted me and that, like played with me, made me play with him, sucked on me, made me suck him.

**Nick 23(535)**

Once the required activity was completed, Nick was no longer required and was summarily dealt with. As he noted in a very matter-of-fact manner, at “about 7.30” the next morning, “he just gave me my clothes, said, ‘Put them on’. I put them on” [23(535)]. Before taking him back to the place from where he had abducted him, he instructed Nick that “if you ever tell anybody about this, God will kill you and if he doesn’t, I’ll come back and I’ll kill you” [23(535)]. A strange man, an abusive and threatening experience, with the promise of retribution if Nick spoke; it was a situation imbued with abandonment, premature sexualisation, and premature independence:

He walked me down to the corner where the Railway Hotel was but like a little bit before it and said, “Go!”, because he knew that my mum would still be there like she was every other fuckin day.

**Nick 23(539)**

Taken from an environment where his absence was unlikely to be noticed because of intoxication, held in a foreign environment, he was now returned to the pub. At age four, he must have been bewildered. Returning to his mother, the greeting was not one of concern but an angry and alcoholic response and further violence:

So I went running back inside and Mum went off her guts at me, “where the fuck have you been?” Pissed as a maggot: slapped me around a bit. Then she took me home.

**Nick 23(539)**

Some 10 years later, in recalling the story of the abuse, he was instructed by a person beyond the bounds of his family on “what’s right and what’s wrong”. In so doing, he reconnected with the experience, and his mother, in a different way:

...then at the age of 14, I finally got told by the school counsellor what’s right and what’s wrong and when she was saying what was wrong I was like, “Hey, that’s happened to me before”. So I decided I would go home and tell Mum. Mum knows what’s best. So I took myself home from school, told Mum. By that time, the bloke had already moved. No sign of his name, nothing.

**Nick 23(539)**

Notwithstanding the disconnection and abandonment so evident within his early life experience, Nick remembers this crucial event, and his older brother (Phil) is a part of exacting revenge for the abuse that was done to his brother:

Then Phil caught up with him one day on a train because I was sitting with Phil and I looked across and this bloke went like this [nodded] to me and smiled and I looked down at his left knee and there was four big scars there; exactly the same as that other bloke's. I said, "Your name wouldn't happen to be Andy, would it?", and his eyes just like, a really worried look. I said, "Your name's Andy, isn't it", and he's gone, "no, my name is Marcus". I've gone, "Your name's Andy, you lying cunt". I kicked him in the head and put his head through the glass. Phil walked over, grabbed him, smashed him up a whole heap and then threw him off at Erskineville train station and three people came over and asked him what happened and we were still standing there at the time and we were waiting for the next train because we were going in the opposite direction. We only had to Erskineville, then turn around and go back out towards Bankstown way. Then my big brother turned around and told him what happened and they said, don't worry, we'll take care of him. So these three blokes picked him up and he was found murdered about three days later.

Nick 23(539)

Phil's early background was imbued with disconnection, abuse, violence and the experience of connecting with family around disturbing experiences. It was not until much later, when he stopped living with his mother on a permanent basis, that the experience of home began to shift and change, instigated by changes in his mother's lifestyle. However by that stage, Nick was himself in a whirlwind of homelessness, criminal activity and court appearances.

When I first visited Nick and his mother, his life appeared more stable. His mother had a new partner, Chris, with whom she had been for some years and with whom she shared a lawn mowing and gardening business. They were steadily improving their lot in life. At that time, Phil was in gaol and Nick was between home and the city. The relationship between Nick and Chris appeared to be less fractious than those with his mother's previous partners, notwithstanding the volatility in Nick's behaviour:

He's all right except for, I got, you know, in a stolen car. Chris called me "a good for nothing car thief". So I stole his car and burnt it out and wrote it off and that, and then I got locked up for three months for doing that and then I got out. Before that, I was allowed to call him Dad and then after about a month inside he said, "He's never allowed into the house again". Mum agreed. Then about a week ago he has actually said that I can call him Dad again and I'm allowed into the house, stuff like that, but living with them is off limits.

Nick 23(139)

What is interesting about that part of Nick's story is the contrast between his excitement in retelling the stories of violence in the home and the reparative threads and relative softness in language he used about his relationship with Chris. Being able to call Chris "Dad" is important to Nick, even after his experience with all the other male figures revolving through the house, and even after the violence of other men, and Chris' rejection of him at the time his car was "burnt out". Home is a tough place to be for Nick, and his images and memories are vivid but strangely without emotion; he simply tells the story.

### Formation in childhood and adolescence

Home is the primary formative environment for a child's social, educational, and physical development. While much of that formation comes about through action and instruction on the part of people within that environment—parents, siblings, teachers, and friends—other less active experiences are also formative. A child sits and watches. In the watching, he or she takes in the messages implicit within the actions of others:

I don't know because I have always grown up around it. Like my big brother was always in and out of Cobham and Mt Penang [juvenile detention centres] and all that. My big brother's best mates; they always used to come around in hotties and that, and take me for drives and I got into a cop chase once with them, and I loved it. It was the biggest rush: you just get this mad adrenalin rush and I loved it.

Nick 23(151)

For Nick, these messages, conveyed as they are through the actions of others, into which he is swept up, are powerfully formative and direct his own behaviour; "So [he] started stealing cars by [him]self and [he] just, I don't know: it's just the adrenalin rush" [23(151)]. He came to love and desire the experience of theft because of the sensation it delivered. The adrenalin and the attraction to risk are "not important but it makes your head go light and you don't feel like, you know, you don't think" [23(155)].

It appears that one of the learnt life-goals for Nick is to have an experience with an absence of thinking:

There is a thing called “Stop, think, do”; you just fuck the stop, fuck the thinking, just do it. And you do it, and then you get into a cop chase, you get pulled over, you run into a tree or whatever. Whatever happens, happens.

Nick 23(155)

There is an awareness of social rules, guidance through public discourse and school campaigns—“Stop, Think, Do”—but along side this memorable and simple message is another more powerful one. It is experientially gained within the broader family context: “fuck the stop, fuck the thinking, just do it”. This message holds considerable sway over his thinking and his behaviour. Connected with that pervasive attitude is a type of fatalism, the sense that “whatever happens” will simply happen and there is very little control over events in life, not a surprising realisation given the narrative of the abuse event already described.

Nick’s cavalier description of dangerous behaviour was without emotional embellishment and showed little understanding of the connection between reckless behaviour and potential serious consequences to self and others. For him, “Thinking is a very good thing to do, but yeah, like, avoid all risks of getting caught [in a car chase] basically. It’s just the way that the human mind thinks when they are in a cop chase” [23(155)]. Given his powerful environmental context, his developmental phase, and the leadership provided by his older brother, he observes powerful figures in his life speaking and talking in an antisocial fashion. It is unlikely that he could reason through to any other thinking position or behavioural stance.

For Nick, thinking is something he registers as being important, and yet his reasoning capacity is under-developed at age 17. He knows and comprehends the public messages of restraint and safety, and he can see that thinking is “a very good thing”, but thinking is suspended as capacity, emotion, and example control the direction he takes. As Taylor (2002) has indicated, “Part of what gives feelings their primacy is that they determine conduct. One’s feelings make a difference to one’s actions” (p. 8). The context and cradle of Nick’s feelings, and of his personal formation, is powerful and persuasive.

Alongside his early exposure to violence and criminal activity, there were other contextual experiences and other people, both of which also proved formative and defining. An older next door neighbour exercised an influence from an early age. She was aged 16 and “[he] was 11 and [he] liked her. She seemed to like [him] and [they] ended up doing things” [23(79)]. Sexual experimentation with his neighbour began at an early age and outside the home:

Nick: No, not my house, her house. Her mum trusted her enough to let her stay at home by herself and yeah, one thing led to another when we were playing the Nintendo and I found her hand on my crotch and I seemed to enjoy it, so we went for it.

DL: Did you know what to do?

Nick: No, but she instructed pretty damn well.

Nick 23(88-91)

Nothing more is said about his neighbour or his early sexual experiences until the next phase in his life, which began with his move to the inner city.

### A transition to the city

Nick first came to the inner city of Sydney when he was aged 12, brought to this area by his older brother. At that point, certain pathways were inevitable:

We rang up my mother. Mum said, “Don’t bother coming home, Phil, but bring your little brother back”. Then Phil said, “No, if you’re going to kick me out, what is to say you’re not going to do it to my brother when he is a little bit older, so I’m going to keep him with me”. So I stayed with Phil. At the time Phil was working *The Wall*, I was not.

Nick 23(43)

Phil was 21 at the time. He was in and out of home having lived on the street, in refuges, juvenile detention, and one episode in an adult prison. Nick’s transition to the city was unlike Brian’s where there was a moving back and forth, flirting with two very different lifestyles. Nick came to the inner city and remained for some considerable time:

During that six months my big brother was working *The Wall*, obviously. I was just hanging around with his friends, Boxer Craig, Robbie, other people like that. I was getting into a little bit of mischief with them.

Nick 23(175)

Phil introduced his brother to more of his friends and more of the criminal activities he had already witnessed and in which he had participated:

Like they'd get clients, like they wouldn't make me but I would do it of my own free will, like I'd just stand on the side of road like I was working, as soon as somebody would pull over, they'd just come over, grab them, whack, take their wallet, take their car. We'd go, go for a big joy ride, get into a chase, get into trouble, whatever happened, happened.

Nick 23(175)

Besides the assault on potential clients, car theft, and flirtation with self-destruction, all at age 12, Nick was introduced to his brother's involvement in prostitution and was proffered as bait to unsuspecting clients at *The Wall*. The violence to which he has long been privy continued in a new and more exposed form: life on the street. It is unlikely that at 12, Nick could have understood the world into which he had been placed by Phil and his friends.

### **The move to SMSW**

Nick's introduction to *The Wall* was one which involved an initial pretence of sex work. The real aim of the exercise was for his brother's friends to assault and steal from those who came to *The Wall* to procure young males. However, a change occurred that was instigated by Nick's brother. It was a movement from faux sex work to real sex work. As he recounted: "Well, my big brother said to me, 'Look, I'm getting older now; they don't like the older boys, they like nice young boys and it's either, like, you work or we don't have a place to stay'. So I agreed to work" [23(187)]. As he continued: "at the age of about twelve-and-a-half, after about six months of living in a hotel called Maxim Lodge, we ended up, or I ended up, working. I found that I was making a quick dollar and it was a good dollar too, so I started sex work" [23(43)]. As with other descriptions of other personal experience, there was no emotional content to Nick's commentary. These were very matter of fact statements. Like stealing cars and police chases, sex work simply was a part of a lifestyle crafted by Phil for his much younger brother — a necessity for survival.

The mentoring of Nick into SMSW is an important facet of his story. First there was a realisation by Phil that at 21, he was less desirable at *The Wall*, notwithstanding the fact that he

maintained his involvement in PMSW. Second, there was a passing on of the trade to his younger brother and the handing over of responsibility for bringing in an income. Finally, there was the tutoring in SMSW:

The first encounter I had was with a blue Ford Fairmont, the guy's name was supposedly Rick. My big brother said [to the client], "Look, I don't want anybody taking him anywhere. I'll show you my ID so that you don't think I am going to rob you or anything". Phil showed him his ID. We went into this pub and went downstairs into the toilets.

**Nick 23(199)**

As with his earlier experiences at *The Wall* where his brother's "mates" waited to ambush potential clients, while at the same time protecting Nick, this first experience of actual SMSW was a controlled exposure to the phenomenon. It was a limited sexual exposure, a confined and monitored space with his brother on guard as, "Phil waited outside of the toilet and you know he [the client] played with me, got me to play with him. He gave me \$50 and then he walked out" [23(203)]. This first experience involved, "Fondling and other things like sucking ... both of us did sucking" [23(205,211)].

It was only at the point when I asked Nick about what the first experience was like, that a reaction beyond mere description was provided. For Nick, this experience was "fucked!" [23(215)] because,

I knew that once I'd started, basically Phil would know that I'd be able to do it and that I'd have enough guts to do it. So he'd be pressuring me to do more and more every night and then basically, I ended up supporting his drug habit for a couple of years and then in 1993, no, about 1998, I picked up my own drug habit, amphetamines, and yeah: just been working since the first time.

**Nick 23(219)**

His brother's leading had introduced him to many new experiences at an early age. These included being away from home, car theft, assault and robbery, the camaraderie of his brother's friends, and street-based sex work. Support of his brother's substance use and the development of his own "drug habit" appeared to be introduced experiences about which Nick was less than enthusiastic. For Nick, drugs "have been [an issue] in the past, yeah. I worked out over the last three years before this year, I'd spent \$750,000 on them" [23(371)].

The use of drugs also exercised a limit on his contact with the world around him, because the need for money supplanted the satisfaction of other needs. He made mention of this when I was attempting to arrange an interview. He told me that it could be difficult to contact him, “because every time [he] got a mobile, [he] swapped it with [his] drug dealer” [23(367)]. Substance use created disconnection from others, and while it was the primary reason for any ongoing involvement in SMSW, at the time of the interview and after five years of working, his involvement in sex work had,

... already ended because for the last week, week and a half I haven't been up there: haven't felt the need to go up there because I'm not using drugs no more. That's basically my main reason why I was going up there.

Nick 23(480-487)

An end to work or a momentary hiatus; the connection between family history, sibling mentoring, and substance abuse, with SMSW, is clear.

### **The complex experience of SMSW**

Beyond his family and personal history, Nick's involvement with *The Wall* was complex and wide-ranging. There were positive and negative experiences, and much of his and our understanding of sex work is rooted in the different types of sex work practices and the different types of clients in SMSW.

Nick spoke clinically about his practice of SMSW. He had clear ideas about the types of work he would practice and the cost imposed on each different type of work:

Basically minimum up there is \$50 .... That'll get you a head job, that's it, with a condom on. \$50 straight head job, \$60 head job lick your balls, \$70 head job, lick your balls, lick your nipples, cuddle, lay in bed, whatever for half an hour. \$80 you get a head job, lick your balls, lick your nipples, slight nipple torture, cuddle, lay in bed, kiss. At the end of it you always tell them you're not allowed to blow in my mouth, or nothing, so don't even bother trying to take the condom off. Then from there it jumps up to \$100 which is half an hour of you giving it to them. From there on, I don't know but for an hour, if they want me for an hour, it's double the price.

Nick 23(283, 287)

Variations within sex work are created by the different clients that come to *The Wall*. It is a random situation over which he attempts to exercise some control. Out of his experience of

SMSW, he is able to define and categorise the types of people who seek sexual contact with him. First, there are the clients he regards in a negative fashion. These are “clients that are complete arseholes; they’re mugs” [23(419)]. Second, “... you’ve got clients that are okay; they’re Johns” [23(419)]. These are the ordinary clients. They neither stand out from the crowd, nor are they aggravating. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, there are the clients from *The Wall* who cross the boundary between sex work and the worker’s personal life:

Then you’ve got clients that you actually, like you know they know where you’re coming from because they’ve had to do it themselves and they’ve worked their way from the bottom of the pit to the top and they’re packing in the last handful of dirt and patting it down. They’re friends.

Nick 23(419)

“Mugs” and “Johns” are common experiences within the SMSW scene. It is a natural, perhaps somewhat simplistic, divide between good and bad clients who are judged so by the way they treat the worker and the largesse of their payments. “Friends” is a rare category, only spoken of by a small number of the participants. For Nick, first of all, clients becoming “friends” is about understanding. “They’ve had to do it themselves” does not imply the client’s prior involvement in sex work but it does mean that they understand what it means to struggle “from the bottom of the pit to the top”. It is all about understanding and the rapport that arises because of this shared state. It is also about the willingness of the client to understand, at an emotional level, and in an ongoing fashion, and then to financially support him, as a clear indicator of that emotional understanding:

Yeah, because some of them understand where you are coming from and for instance there’s a client that I have got, Michael. He lives down in Wollongong and he’s relatively cool. Like if I rung him up this afternoon and said, “Look, Mick, I’m having trouble with somebody, can you put \$150 in my account”, he’d say yeah, sure, but next time you come down I’m going to get you do my dishes or I’m going to get you to vacuum the floor or something. Do you know what I mean?

Nick 23(423)

There is a broader life experience with these clients. It is not just about sex work. The contact is shaped towards a greater level of ongoing involvement and support. Financial assistance is given without the usual sexual recompense being provided by him in return. Nonetheless, they are clients, “You still do jobs with them but you see them as more of a friend than a client” [23(431)].

While the culturing of this form of client is a structured process on Nick's part, the discovery of such clients forms a part of the randomness that is *The Wall*. He does not easily find them, nor does he immediately assess them as fitting the category of friend. It has an accidental quality to it that reiterates the haphazard nature of SMSW.

Nick described one such encounter and the initial stages of assessment, negotiation and alignment that occur in the development of the client/friend. The first position was one of doubt; to think that there must be something suspicious about the potential client, either because of his looks or the mere fact that he is at *The Wall*:

Perfect example, right, when it comes to people that you think "iffy booty" about them; not everybody that has tattoos listens to AC/DC and drives a V8 Commodore is bad: like they're not going to rape you: not all of them.

Nick 23(632)

There is a reasonably constant fear that danger lurks within every potential client, and every client is a potential rapist. There was another level within Nick's thinking that he is able to acknowledge: that looks can be deceiving. Further exploration was required to clarify client intent:

For instance I've got a client, right, Jimmy. He drives a V8 Club Sport. He's got tattoos all up and down his arms and that. He is not fat or anything but he's pretty big-set and like he'd been driving around one night and I was looking at the car going, "fuck, that's a nice car!" Then he's pulled over and he's stopped and I thought, why not; I'll go up to him and speak to him and that, you know.

Nick 23(632)

Image was significant in Nick's assessment of potential clients. What they looked like personally, how they presented, and their accoutrements were all key elements in an assessment process that, in the first instance, was largely observational. If these elements were acceptable, attractive, or at least intriguing, then an approach was made:

So I walked over and I have thrown off by saying, like, "Do you know what the time is please?" He's wound down the passenger window and he's gone, "Are you working?" I said, "yeah". He's gone, "how much?" So I told him my prices and that, even though I was wary of him because you know he had tattoos and shit. He looked like he'd only just gotten out of Long Bay [gaol] or something.

Nick 23(632)

Within the wariness, and with the intrigue, contact was made and the next stage of the assessment began to unfold:

He's gone, "why are you looking at me like that for?" because I had a really weird look on my face, like a confused look of, is this guy somebody who is going to rape me and kill me or is this guy somebody who's going to do the job, say thanks a lot, see you next week and drive off.

Nick 23(632)

The encounter was tentative and the concern about rape, or more, appeared ever present in this early stage of the encounter. At first, what Nick wanted and needed was clear: safety and a job with no strings attached. The rough and raw assessment continued, underpinned by curiosity in both parties, but now in a much blunter form:

So I told him why. I said, "Look, you know, are you for real or what?" He's gone, "what do you mean, am I for real?" I said, "you've got tattoos, you are a big-set lad, you look like you've just gotten out of Long Bay gaol, you've probably got a wife and kids, man: you know, you look straight". He's gone, "I'm bi".

Nick 23(632)

What occurred was a testing out of the person. Using images and stereotypes as a default position or benchmark, Nick engaged this potential client in a conversation. This part of the assessment called for a relational reaction—either positive or negative—or withdrawal. Either way, from the relative safety of the street curb, Nick intensified the assessment of this potential client in a way that aimed to create clarification and safety.

I said, "if you are bi why don't you try and portray yourself in a little bit more faggy-ish way" and he's turned around and he's gone, "because I'm a mechanic and a mechanic ain't allowed to be gay; he ain't allowed to look gay at all". So I said to him, "fair enough". He's gone, "so what were the prices again?", so I told him the prices again and what he got for them. He said "okay, fair enough", so I jumped in the car with him

Nick 23(632)

There was an almost aggressive quality or character to the questioning of this potential client, as if to say to him, 'Well, prove your credibility!' Having carried out the assessment and negotiated the event, sex work happened, but it was "just oral" [23(644)].

Nick provided another account of his assessment process that outlined further understanding of the risks that he attempted to avoid, while also taking further risks. As he indicated, the general guidelines were in place, and he sought "people that aren't pushy. People

that don't try and talk you down in price and people that, you know, seem genuine. They're the people that you go with" [23(652)]. The major question was about how this gets assessed in detail: how does one discover if a potential client is genuine within the context of SMSW? This question did not appear to produce answers, but Nick attempted to enact a process that he hoped would sort the good from the bad clients:

You know, you say "do you mind if we go for a drive around the block because if the police see us sitting here they're going to think something is up because we are sitting at *The Wall* in a car and we are talking and my face is obviously going to be known around here for the working factor" and if they say, "look, I just want to know the prices and then we'll go", you just say "look mate, sorry, see you later".

Nick 23(656)

If the potential client accepted this request, then what Nick saw as the first stage of an assessment process could well place him in danger. He may enter a stranger's car. This person may "rape [him] and kill [him]" [23(632)]. It was this fear he referred to several times during the interview. However, there was another layer of questioning that was used by Nick to further assess and filter potentially harmful situations:

But you know. If they are like, "sure, not a problem" and you tell them the prices and they try and talk you down, then you know they're going to try and rip you in some way, shape or form. Or if yeah, but if they're cool with the prices that you give them or if you've just got like a sense about them that this bloke ain't good, automatically the price jumps up like \$100 so that they go, "no, don't worry about it", and they drive away...

Nick 23(656)

Arguments about price and a generalised sense that "this bloke ain't good" produced a clear position in Nick that all was not acceptable and that the potential client was to be avoided. Rather than confronting this head on, he used price to force the potential client out of the equation, "and they drive away". Assessment around the issue of price formed another avenue of defence. However, it was a crude and haphazard assessment tool. But this was not the conclusion of the assessment process, for information gained through the assessment was information to be shared among others also engaging in SMSW. Nick's assessment was passed on:

... then as soon as they drive away you just run around and tell everybody, "there's a bloke in such and such car, such and such number plate, he seems a bit suss, be wary of him"...

Nick 23(656)

While he was thinking about others engaged in SMSW, in this process of passing on the assessment, it was also about Nick, his reputation, and one senses, his own security:

... then that way nobody can say, "Hey, I saw you get out of the car and I got into the car and did a job with him and then he raped me" or whatever. That can't be blamed on me because I've run around, I've told everybody. If they're stupid enough to go with him, be your own boss: not me. So yeah.

Nick 23(656)

Nick understands from his earliest experiences at *The Wall* that it is a place that can be violent, and not just from potential clients. The violence his brother's "mates" enacted on clients can also turn against those who work *The Wall*. In a market place increasingly thin of customers because of the advent of the royal commission into police corruption and paedophilia (Wood, 1997b, 1997c), reputation and turf were significant issues of concern.

Notwithstanding his emphasis on assessment, clients at *The Wall* present with a mixture of sexual and other tastes. Some of these have an air of violence and abuse, while others may be potentially dangerous for Nick in the volatility that is SMSW:

Nick: I've had people that want me to bash them, spit on them, call them dogs, kick them in the face. I've had people that want me to tie them up, whip them with chains. I have had people that want me to tie their balls up and pull on them as hard as I can. I have had people that want me to bash them with coat hangers because of the feel of the cold metal and the pain at the same time gets them off. I've had people that want me to have sex with their wife while they watch. I've had people that want me to have sex with their wife while they are having sex with their wife. I've had females that have just come up there tripping off their guts saying hey, we want somebody to fuck, we will even pay you. So I did that.

DL: That's a huge variety of sexual experiences?

Nick: Yes, it is. But I gladly say I've never done anal and I have never, ever, ever been tied up.

Nick 23(234-239)

Client assessments are imperative and an ongoing feature for Nick in his involvement with *The Wall*. They occur, "Every time" [23(660)] he works and to that extent, they are a structured and organised process. However, they are also haphazard because of the content within the process. It is an uncertain and largely intuitive process that may or may not help protect him from adversity. Having noted one aspect of the SMSW experience for Nick, there are other

experiences—particularly those that occur with clients known as friends—where *commonality* and *friendship* open up a different perspective on SMSW.

### The turn to commonality and friendship

There are extremes in behaviour that are lived out within the sex work environment of *The Wall*. Nick is exposed to these forces and, at times, he joins with these forces. Where he really seems comfortable is when commonality and friendship are discovered within the context of sex work. At this stage, we return to his narrative on Jimmy, the tattooed man with the V8 Club Sport car. It was the tattoos and the car that were key aspects in the initiation of negotiations. Nick and this client,

... ended up having a lot in common. He likes AC/DC, I like AC/DC. He's into like a little bit of rap, not much though. I commented on his car and that and friggen we ended up doing a job and that.

Nick 23(632)

And this commonality led to other possibilities in the relationship, as Nick indicates:

He said "look, I know you don't know me and that, but if you trust me, I'm going to Orange next weekend. Here's my mobile number, if you want to come for the trip down there, I'm going down there, picking up a container of stuff in this like truck that he owns, and coming back. If you trust me enough or if you feel you are up to it, you want an honest wage for the weekend give me a call on Friday, I'll come and pick you up Friday night and we'll head off Friday night. We'll return Sunday night".

Nick 23(644)

The offer brought with it the possibility of regular paid work but also risks. Jimmy was still an unknown quantity because Nick's assessment of him was, of necessity, a fairly limited exercise.

Notwithstanding the risks, the offer was accepted:

I said, "Ah, you know, I'll give it a go", he's gone, "all right, sweet!" So he's come pick me up Friday night. Friday night we went down to Orange, we got there Saturday at about 4.30, 5 o'clock in the morning. We went into the hotel room that he had booked for us. There was bubbly bath, friggen bottle of champagne, pot, amphetamines and we stayed up all night that night obviously, just talking and that.

Nick 23(644)

A connection occurs but in the commonality, that is this burgeoning friendship, other activities take place: closeness, intimacy, substance use, conversation, and sex. Friendship, understanding, emotional support, and an ability to rely on another person, are also produced:

We found that we had a hell of a lot more in common. He's into soccer and shit like that and yeah. Now I classify him as a friend because he's somebody who I can actually go to the workshop that he owns and say, "Look, I'm in pretty big trouble here", tell him what the trouble is. If I need money, he'll give it to me and he always ends up adding, "don't forget you have to pay me back", with a big smile on his face. I'm like yeah, all right.

DL: That payment is in sex?

Nick: No, he just says that because the boys downstairs might see him handing over \$200 to me and think it is a little bit weird.

Nick 23(644-648)

A hidden or personal language arises between the two people. There is a connection that is hidden from others but enjoyed by Jimmy and Nick. What started as oral sex is transformed through a rudimentary and haphazard assessment, and ongoing contact, into a friendship that may involve sex but where the cost of the friendship is no longer sex. The currency in the relationship has shifted and a positive outcome is achieved by Nick. Other things have shifted as well. Meaning changes with advent of different practices, and it is that shift in the *practice* and the *meaning* that also requires understanding.

### **Practice and meaning within sex work**

Within the story of Jimmy, we see explored the core aims or beliefs for Nick about life in general and SMSW in particular. He likes risk-taking activity, he desires to be understood, he wants emotional support, and he needs financial assistance. What is not understood through this particular story is his perspective on SMSW at 17 and after some five years of involvement in this practice.

At the beginning of this exploration of practice and meaning in SMSW, Nick defined himself at the level of sexual identity. This definition allowed him to sustain involvement in SMSW. As he indicated, "I'd say I'm straight. At work I'm bi. As soon as I leave work I'm

straight” [23(251)]. Nick was a straight man who could be bisexual for the purpose of work. It was a form of work that was chosen over other forms of work because “There’s other ways to make money but you can’t make \$700 a night at the age of 13 if you go out and you get a legitimate job” [23(255)]. Nick framed his understanding of SMSW through his own fantasy of sex, and then, through his experience at *The Wall*. First, he considered his own fantasies, which he viewed in heterosexual terms:

Yeah. Basically they like being pampered. You know, like, it’s the same as a bloke. A bloke, he’d love to have two 18 year old blonde chicks with big tits, long legs, you know what I mean. That’s his ultimate fantasy. That is basically any bloke’s fantasy that’s straight, I know, to have two women at once.

Nick 23(327)

He then applied this to a homosexual framework as he understood it:

That’s the same as gay men. Basically most of their fantasies are: well hung, masculine body, long brown hair or something like that, tattoos, something to show that they are masculine and that, yeah. Two of them, even better.

Nick 23(327)

In the process of defining what heterosexual men want, he also defined the homosexual experience and masculinity within a stereotypic framework. Two is better than one.

Nick then explored the meaning of SMSW through his own experience at *The Wall*, coloured, as it necessarily was, by all the other life experiences in which he had engaged or to which he had been exposed:

Everybody likes having sex. I’ve got to say that. Like, yeah, obviously you can’t exactly walk into an 18 plus place [venue] and find a 16, 17, 15, 14, whatever your fuckin’ fancy is: you can’t find somebody who is going to be in there of that age, so you’ve got to elsewhere to get it. If it means paying money, well, it’s the same as going to a club.

Nick 23(279)

Paying for sex is normalised; an adult having sex with a person of “16, 17, 15, 14” is also normalised for “everybody likes sex” and everyone needs it. Going to *The Wall* is like going to a club. It is about going to a place and getting what you “fuckin’ fancy” in life, and we all have to pay for what we fancy. For Nick, it is simply a commercial proposition: they want and I have. The outcome is the imperative. Even later on, when he was 17 and still working *The Wall*, his sex

work operation was enhanced by other activities on the street and it remained a commercial practice with a major emphasis on outcomes:

They want younger boys. I've got like six or seven people that keep asking me if you find somebody who is in between 13 and 15 give me a call. I'll give you \$100.

Nick 23(267)

In the first instance, his descriptions appeared devoid of both emotion and moral character in relation to himself and others. And yet, the expletive, “fuckin”—associated with what you “fancy”—was used by him to apply a form of negative emphasis [23(279)]. So, even though he appeared open to the experience of paid sex with minors, it was not without some level of judgement when he exclaimed about such clients: “I just think that they're dirty fucks” [23(275)].

Nick continued the cross comparison between the pub or club and *The Wall* by exploring the parallel nature of the transactions that occur, in his mind, in both places. In the first instance, both venues are for the same purpose, that is, to get what you fancy and what you fancy is sex. Nick then noted the risks associated with seeking what you want at a club or pub:

You could go to a pub, stay there all night, buying a guy a drink all night, you know, giving him cigarettes all night, giving him alcohol all night, just at the end of the night for him to say, “No”. There you go; dole cheque gone or pay cheque, whichever one, whole thing's gone. No sex.

Nick 23(279)

For Nick, and notwithstanding all the effort that is invested, seeking sex in social venues is a fraught, and possibly a futile, experience. Then there is *The Wall*:

Whereas they can come up there, to *The Wall*, they can just go, “I want this, this and this. This is what I can pay you”. If you like what they're going to pay you, you say yes. If you don't like what they're paying, you say, “Go, go find somebody else who is cheaper.”

Nick 23(279)

For Nick, given the parameters he established about what people want in life—outcomes—and given his experience of relationships, pubs and intimacy, getting what you need through an interaction at *The Wall* is a clearer and surer transaction.

This is Nick's analysis of the SMSW scene at a distance, based on his observations of SMSW in general, but not necessarily on an analysis into which he is personally inserted. In other

words, the analysis he provides does not take into account the experience of self-within-the-phenomenon. While Nick can see the logic in seeking what you want at *The Wall*, the analysis changes when he places himself into the equation. He is clear that, “I don’t like working, don’t like doing it. I’m only there for the money” [23(295)]. At the time of the interview, Nick had been absent from *The Wall* for some three weeks. There had been breaks in his involvement with SMSW before, but he appeared clear that MSW was no longer for him. However, there was an exception—a specific criterion—he applied in any consideration of a return to MSW:

What would take me back there? If my mum rang me up and said look, I’ve got no money, the bills are stacking up over my head, can you help me, because I’d rather do that than go out and rob some old lady of her pension on pension day.

Nick 23(299)

Again, family comes to the fore in the defining of his life, a theme most common in his narrative. Despite her own lack of care for Nick at age four, he retains a commitment to assist his mother if ever she is in need. Notwithstanding this commitment and his willingness to engage in SMSW to assist his mother, his attitude to his involvement in SMSW is clear: “I want to stop it. I’m sick of it. I am getting too old. They don’t like older boys. They want younger ones” [23(263)]. Nick was 17 at the time of this comment.

SMSW is about very young people working *The Wall*. That was his experience and that of his brother before him. That was his expectation and the reality with which he dealt with life. You work when you are young and then you move on, and if you can, you attempt to *craft a future* out of the experience of SMSW.

### **Crafting a future**

The future of any person is crafted out of the present and the past. In the first place Nick, like his brother Phil before him, has been homeless since an early age. This influences his future although it is a mostly unspoken seam of influence. It sits quietly in the background. His father was a “roamer”; his brother was homeless and in gaol. It is a solid history of disadvantage

against which he acts. Despite setbacks, he does not think of suicide because he is “very strong minded” [23(592)]. He sources this resilience to his familial roots: “I think my Mum” [23(596)].

His mother is a central repository and reference point for Nick. Her life has been chaotic in the past, and Nick has been privy to that chaos in a very intimate way. Yet she has survived, changed and stabilised. Nick is aware of the connection with his father’s tradition but is acutely aware that his mother’s influence is also present, and this appears stronger. Crafting a future for himself may well involve claiming her tradition of survival for himself, just as he has also claimed her as the object of his protection and care. There are other points of influence that also assist in his survival. Friends play a significant role: “I’ve good friends to talk to for when you’re feeling sad and that and you need to get stuff off your chest: to have somebody who isn’t going to open up their mouth” [23(608)]. A key criterion for friendship is confidentiality, but the crafting of friendships requires more:

There’s a whole bunch of things like you need, to have good friends. You need to have, like, a big heart basically. Even if you don’t know the person, you say hello to them when you walk past them, just so then, that way, you’re keeping the peace with them. Like you don’t stare at them, like, “What the fuck are you looking at dick head”, you know. If somebody is walking past and they stare, you just go, “How are you mate?” Just keep the peace with everybody because if you don’t, guaranteed somebody is going to back around and fuck you up: somehow, some way, somewhere. It doesn’t matter. It’s like karma. You steal an old grandma’s handbag: 10, 15 years later somebody is going to steal something of yours. Some people don’t believe in karma but I do.

**Nick 23(612)**

Friends are crucial to survival. They support, are loyal and have “a big heart”. However, survival is also about keeping the peace and avoiding conflict. A core aspect of creating a future is avoiding negative actions because they have negative ramifications. The inflicting of karma is something of which Nick is fearful, but also something he has been involved in exacting on others in concert with his brother’s friends. It is, perhaps, a positive reflection after a body of negative experiences.

The conditions of crafting a future are reasonably clear now for Nick. Recognise paternal influence, utilise maternal strength, gain and maintain peace and friendship, and avoid bad karma. There is, however, some specificity to his thoughts about the future:

I will definitely have a house, not my own place but yeah, I'll be renting a place. Within the next couple of months I'm hoping to be able to do correspondence: my Year 10 certificate. After that I want to go and join the army to protect and serve.

**Nick 23(624)**

Clear plans and goals, and with a familiar theme, which have long been thought about and acted out within his family environment: "to protect and serve". As indicated earlier, the future is crafted onto the present against the background of the past, and this is evident within his aspiration to join the army:

I don't know. It's kind of the same as an adrenalin rush of getting a cop chase. If you get called out to a battlefield that you have to go to, it would be a lot of fun being able to shoot people and actually get congratulated for it. I don't know; it's just my weird way of thinking.

**Nick 23(628)**

For Nick, crafting a future is not about starting again. It is not about creating a new and vastly different set of attitudes and experiences. It is a process whereby he aims to reframe and extend his current thinking, his experience, and desires into a more workable model within the available context. For Nick, crafting a future involves legitimising the past and the present, and building on it. By so doing, he removes the chance of internal dissonance, which would arise as a consequence of crafting a future outside of his historical context and natural horizon. What makes it possible for Nick to think about crafting a future in line with his historical context and natural horizon is the experience of having his involvement in sex work accepted within the family context. While Nick remains strongly connected to this context and horizon, other males involved in SMSW separate themselves from their family and their history because of the dominating experience of dissonance within family and community.

### Profile 3: Steph

**A country boy, who moves to and from the city.  
He finds love and rejection in family, and love and rejection in a mate.  
He work at *The Wall*, and elsewhere,  
He creates positive pathways out of negative moments.**

#### Prologue

While Brian and Nick are Sydney boys, Steph (20) came from the country and his involvement in sex work traversed the streets of both a small rural town and a major city. Steph arrived in Sydney for the first time when he “was about 14” [13(39)]. He came to visit his sister who was living with her partner in a beachside suburb a 30 minute ferry ride from the centre of Sydney. Movement characterised his life after leaving home. He spent different periods over a number of years with his sister, her partner and various other friends and associates. He lived in inner urban, suburban and outer urban areas, with occasional returns to his country region of origin. As he indicated: “we’ve been all over the place” [13(91)].

#### Family relationships

The connection between Steph and his sister pivoted around a number of shared concerns and interests, although the primary relationship was that: “me and my sister have always sort of been the outcasts of the family. So we get on better” [13(115)]. For Steph, another linkage for him with his sister was that they “both smoked pot” [13(119)]. This was a dividing point for Steph within his family, for while he and his sister smoked cannabis, “the other two brothers, they’re sort of like yuppie, high class” [13(119)]. This was a division he reiterated with greater force later in the interview when he referred to his brother Jake as “a little yuppie cunt” [13(1052)]. Similarity, shared conflict and mutual interests drew some members of the one family

together while the perception and experience of difference within the family clearly divided them as a family.

Steph held a strong memory about his origins, that is, how he came to be. It influenced his thinking about his place in the world and his relationship with his mother. The remembering began with a declarative statement:

I was a miracle to be born. They told Mum after about the fourth, fifth miscarriage that if she kept trying that she was going to kill herself .... Yeah, I'm actually a miracle.

**Steph 13(147, 151)**

Steph had older siblings who were adopted. He was the first born of his parents' biological offspring. After exclaiming that he was a "miracle" child, he continued the story of his early days and months. He was "snatched...straight from her arms" and "rushed to John Hunter Hospital" and remained there "for six months or so" because of complications for him at birth. After he left hospital, he went to live with his aunt "for the next six months, no, the next seven or eight months because she [his mother] was a month in hospital after Jake [his brother] was born". In the end, and in spite of her resolve to "keep trying", there was a pervasive and early disconnection as "she never got to see me" [13(151)]. Notwithstanding the "miracle" of his existence and the risks taken by his mother to give birth, he was an outcast within his family.

Life was "pretty good" [13(183)] when he was "around 6 to 10" years of age [13(187)], and although "nothing really happened" when he turned 10, he was caught smoking and "we were always getting flogged for stupid little things". As a consequence, there was division between his siblings because his brother became a "little fuckin nark" [13(191)]. This was the beginning of a separation and simultaneous connection process within his family. It was a disconnection from mother and brother, and a strong bonding with sister. During his childhood and early adolescence, Steph searched for other support and became close to the mother of a friend:

That's my next-door neighbour's mother. She's been like a better mother really than what my mother has been. You know, because when I got flogged by my mum with either the jug cord or a wooden spoon or a stick or a leather belt with a buckle and you know, I'd go over to her and

I'd cry on her shoulder. And she'd always be there for me, always. She wouldn't say anything when I was bitching about Mum. She is a second mum to me.

**Steph 13(932)**

There was colourful language for his relationship with his mother, right from day one. He was "snatched" from her arms at the hospital and yet "flogged" by her during his childhood and early adolescence. While this shows the tenor of the relationship between mother and son, as one of distance and punishment, these descriptions are used to enhance an understanding of the connection between his mother and his younger brother:

If I use the phone, like he'll run straight back into Mum and tell Mum and then Mum will just, she goes clean off her head at me. All the time ...

**Steph 13(1012)**

His brother Jake was viewed as close to the family and the favoured son. In being so defined, Steph described himself as distant or separated from the family, even while living within the home. Beyond the division and anger, resentment also appeared prevalent within the family environment for Steph in relation to his brother because "he thinks he's better than all of us" [13(203)]. Within an environment marked by distance, division, anger, and resentment, Steph experienced further isolation by feeling affection for his father without the sense that he was being protected. When there was discord within the home and Steph felt unjustly dealt with by his mother, "Dad just gives me that look, as if to say, 'Oh sorry son, you know I can't do anything'." [13(1012)].

From 14, when he first left home to the time of our interview, Steph returned to live with his family on occasions but could not actually live in the family home. As he indicated, "I'm not allowed to have any friends in the house because mum thinks they're all junkies" [13(1052)]. This is one explanation for his absence, but there was a clash between him and his brother that continued from childhood into adulthood: "I can't handle living with him. He is always, he is just annoying" [13(1012)]. The clash appeared to be based on personality issues but there were other conflicts present:

He is that straight he will not even touch a clean ashtray. That's how much of a drama queen he is. He will not pick up a clean ashtray. If he's given me a lift downtown or something, right, he will not let me take an unopened packet of smokes in his car. That's what he's like. He's, I don't know, queer.

**Steph 13(1052)**

“Straight” and yet “queer”; an obvious cultural connection along lines of sexual orientation was thwarted by other cultural practices, and personal and social differences. Where Steph travelled between Nundle and Sydney, and around towns on the Eastern seaboard north of Sydney, his brother Jake remained in Nundle. Jake was a gay man, but with a different type of working relationship with his local community:

He's actually doing pretty well for himself. He works in a pet shop. He has bought his own franchise, washing dogs and that, just dog washing and he works like, one pet shop in Nundle, one pet shop in Port. So he is raking in a bit of money. He gets about \$700 a week or something just for them three jobs.

**Steph 13(199)**

The difference between Steph and Jake, in terms of connection to family, was an ongoing sore point for Steph. As he remarked, again with resentment:

He gives Mum extra rent money and that just to try and look better. She'd only charge us a set amount and then because he moved in and he has got extra money, he gives her extra. Now she didn't ask for it, he just done it to try and make us feel bad, me and my sister.

**Steph 13(203)**

Whether it was Jason's intention to make Steph “feel bad” is irrelevant; that was Steph's experience. It created ambivalence and distance between him and his family. Even with the felt emotional distance between mother and son, the connection remained alive and active, and cast an influence over Steph's thinking and his reactions.

Steph's father was the parental figure to whom he was closest in the family: “I love my Dad to death. You know, me and my Dad, we're really, really close” [13(920)]. The love of son for father was a powerful driver within Steph as “Dad had the hope for me that you know, I'd get with a woman” [13(1016)]. Notwithstanding expectation and the obvious dissonance in desire, it was a powerful relationship that influenced his thinking about himself and his family. Steph was keenly aware that “Mum; she did never want gay children. And I know it's really hurt

my Dad” [13(872)]. Further, Steph is aware of his brother’s disclosure and the impact of this on his father:

It has hurt my Dad because me and my younger brother, we are both biological, and he came out before me. He came out of the closet and told Mum and Dad that he was gay...

**Steph 13(872)**

Steph understood that progeny was important to both his parents, and while he was less concerned about his mother’s perspective, he was sensitive to what was important to his father:

Dad’s like my older brother and my older sister they both have two kids each. Okay. So they are grandparents. But they’re adopted. Now Dad was always hoping on kids from me: to carry the family name on, you know, and be biological grandchildren.

**Steph 13(884)**

It is difficult to surmise the exact impact of this complex and only partially disclosed thinking within Steph. He was acutely aware that his father wanted biological grandchildren, a matter over which he had little control. We know that a generalised disconnection with family led him to be aligned with his sister. It also appears that one consequence of the disconnection Steph felt within his family was that he waited till he was in Sydney when, at 19, he was facing a crisis of his own, to speak of his sexual identity. The disclosure was connected with a health crisis: “five months ago, when I had that scare with the HIV; that’s when I told Mum and Dad I was gay” [13(1020)]. Other points of crisis arose for Steph, and these too were dealt with at a distance from his mother and father:

I’ve been really depressed, just about family problems and that and I was on the brink of just ending it all, basically. If I didn’t make a change in my life pretty soon, that was it. I was, you know, I actually wrote a letter out to Mum and Dad, more to Dad because me and Mum don’t get on, basically saying goodbye. And I was just going to ring them up from down here and say go out the back and have a look in the pot plant, you know.

**Steph 13(828)**

While his family was very present in his thinking, Steph experienced a chronic level of disconnection, a situation that led to depression and feelings of despair. This weighed heavily on him. While he needed and wanted close connections, they were sustained at a distance with only occasional proximate contact. Relationship and closeness was desired, but the fractious and negatively loaded nature of contact with significant family members made anything more than

desire seem a difficult proposition. Closeness can occur in other places with other people. These non-family connections can be meaningful. They helped Steph adapt in the face of adversity, and yet, these relationships were also the cause of sadness.

### **Love, friendship, sadness**

While there may not have been many satisfying relationships at home, Steph was seeking them elsewhere, primarily in the form of friendships and surrogate parent figures. The mother of a friend who lived next door is a good example of a successful bid to find alternative support. However, Steph experienced and crafted other relationships that supported him in what was felt to be an isolated existence.

Brett was an aboriginal boy known to Steph since primary school. He was intensely observed by Steph who thought he was “the most gorgeous boy in the whole school”. Steph “was with him for like five years” [13(415)]. At an early age and while in primary school, the circumstance of a school camp facilitated the beginnings of a sexual exploration and close friendship:

Well, we sort of tried to have intercourse. We did try but I don't think we weren't sort of long enough but we done everything. We basically done everything. You know, oral, you know and we tried, as I said, we tried to have intercourse and that, we kissed, we were basically boyfriends. It was cute, I thought. You know.

**Steph 13(431)**

While there was sexual contact between Steph and Brett, the breadth and depth of the relationship—even at age 12—is of far greater significance:

It is a fond memory. That's my first ever love, you know, and we were in love. I don't know what he seen in me because I was 13 stone at the age of 12. You know, I was always a fat boy. I was always a fat boy and he saw the inner me. You know. He didn't care what I looked like. He liked me for my personality. The first person that actually has, you know. Well, I was only young so of course he was the first person but he was really the only person that has saw me, for me, you know, without taking me on appearance. I'm better looking now than I was back then but you know, he saw my heart and soul.

**Steph 13(435)**

What made it difficult and painful for Steph was where his feelings about the relationship were intensified. This was stimulated, first by Brett's absence, and then by rejection:

See he's half Aboriginal. He's half caste and they moved to Newcastle for five years and when they got back .... I would have been 17, no, yeah, 17 .... I was actually living with my sister .... And he come up to me, because he has got two older brothers and one younger and his older brother is like, they're the Kooris of the town, you know. If anyone fucks with them, you know, they're the hard boys of Nundle. And he come up to me and he said—this really hurt—he said, "I heard some rumours that you're gay." He said, "Oh if you are, just don't try anything on me." You know. Yeah, that broke my heart. It fully broke my heart because we were together for so long and then, you know, he went away one day. I didn't even get a chance to say goodbye. He just didn't come to school one day, you know, because they had to move all of a sudden.

Steph 13(443, 447)

Steph developed a relationship that was peer-based, close, accepting and sexual, and this diluted the pain of the isolation within his family. However, when the difference in sexual orientation was discovered, and confronted, by Brett, it was a hurtful, distressing, barren, and isolating psychological place. So this effort by Steph at finding people and having conversation was rich with emotion but ultimately imbued with rejection. Notwithstanding the rejection he experienced with a peer, the search for connection and conversation continued.

### Connection and conversation

Steph began smoking cigarettes at age nine, and as he indicated about his progression to other drugs, "I wish I'd never, ever lit that first one because it led to everything ... drugs I mean. I reckon that was just the start of it" [13(167, 171)]. While smoking was the beginning of a negative sequence of events in relation to substance use, it was also the beginning of other more positive experiences because of the context of the smoking that provided connections and conversation:

Yeah, because I was, like when I was younger I never hung around people my own age. I just never got on, you know like, because I felt, I don't know. I got on better with older people. They were more my conversation type, you know.

Steph 13(175)

Conversation with peers was difficult because "they are too immature", and in fact there was very little connection with peers because, as children, their "fun" was had by "going and smashing

windows in an empty building”. Steph regarded that as “just stupid” [13(179)]. On the other hand, conversations with adults were “more stimulating” [13(179)]. The motivation was clear: “I love talking to people. I love meeting new people all the time” [13(215)].

There was experience and purpose hidden within the desire for people and conversation. In the first instance, it was because he could see a future within the talking and listening. The desire for conversation emerged because “I really want to become a counsellor. I would love to become a counsellor [13(227)]. This does not appear out of thin air. The desire had a lengthy history based on his own need for company, the history of others who were close, both of which were affirmed by paradoxically positive experiences:

Well, I’ve talked my sister out of committing suicide about four or five times .... So, I mean, she has done it three or four times but every time that she said she was going to do it while I was around, I’d believe her, she was totally serious but I could talk her out of it.

**Steph 13(231, 235)**

Steph experienced constructive agency and positive outcomes within his family around these conversations. It was an experience that had not been evident in other aspects of his family life: it remained “a big point in my life” [13(239)].

Caring about, and being connected to, his sister led him to Sydney at age 14. While in Sydney, he began to be exposed to a greater diversity of influences, not the least of which was his sister’s boyfriend. It was in Steven’s company that we see produced the first impact on Steph of his movement to Sydney:

Steven, that’s her boyfriend; the father of her kids. He introduced me to heroin. So that’s ... yeah. So that’s when I first started using heroin.

**Steph 13(251, 255)**

As Steph indicated, it was a form of substance use that began at 14, “But it wasn’t really serious until I was about 15½. So I could control it until about then” [13(259)].

For a period, Steph was living in Nundle and “every two weeks” he would travel to Sydney and “would stay for like a few days and then go back”. The period he was in Sydney

increased over time and he would “try and stay down” as much as possible “because the drugs were better” in Sydney [13(271)]. As he indicated about this transition to Sydney, and a different lifestyle, “It was a major turning point in my life. I thought drugs were everything. Once I was introduced to it, that was it” [13(271)]. The transition to Sydney was quite complicated. It was not simply about burgeoning substance use. The movement away from home, family, and country all fell against the background of his experience of being a constructive person in his sister’s life. The transition was therefore about his sister, his connection with her and her needs, and about the positive aspects of living in Sydney, including substance use:

They were living in a flat at Manly and they had this house. I can’t remember which suburb it was but it was beautiful. They had a pet possum in the roof and it was just all wooden and like their back verandah, it was just a cliff and bush and I loved it. They had two lorikeets that would come down every morning and we’d feed the lorikeets and that and yeah. The possum would come down, you know, just on dark and we’d feed the possum; you could hand feed it. It lived in the roof. It was a beautiful place, that place.

**Steph 13(283)**

Contained within that positive living experience was the contact with his sister’s boyfriend, who through drugs and personality became a major influence on the 14 year old boy from the country. From Steph’s perspective, there were a number of major points where the impact of contact with Steven was evident. First, there were mental health issues because “he’s schizophrenic and ADD, so it didn’t work out between them two” [13(283)]. Second, “he bashed her” [13(283)]. Finally, “he was bad on the gear [heroin]” [13(291)] and “he would do B&Es [criminal acts] all the time” [13(295)]. While the major recipient of these impacts was his sister, because of her relationship with Steven, these activities also had an effect on Steph. This was because of his age, the consistency of exposure, and his emotional closeness to his sister. Steph was inducted into their lifestyle and this became pivotal in his development:

That memory will never leave. It’s like having your first, you know, intercourse. It is really because I remember, I had it and I loved it, from the first point. It was just like a painkiller. It’s a relievant [sic] of everything; all your worries and problems are just gone, blown out the window. Instead of sitting on the chair, I was sitting in front of the chair with my head down like this and my mouth open and I was just; it’s not like you’re asleep. When you are on the nod, you’re not asleep. Like my sister would go, are you okay, Steph, are you okay? Yeah, I’d open my eyes wide up, you know, like I was normal and I would just go back on the nod again. I thought it was great. I’m glad I have snapped out of that shit now.

**Steph 13(299)**

Steph provided a vivid retelling of the experience, the meaning, context and place of substance use. Perhaps most significantly, he provided an understanding of why it was so difficult to relinquish in favour of a controlled and structured substitute. Notwithstanding the loss experienced in withdrawing from heroin, he achieved this around the time of the interview. For Steph, it was “Two weeks ago, when I got on the methadone program” [13(543)] and “now that I am on the methadone program and I’m nearly into a place [housing], you know, I’m starting to make a go of things and I’m actually starting to feel good about myself, you know” [13(828)].

There was more to the experience than simply drug withdrawal as “... I’m looking for a man to settle down with, which I found one last night but I’m not sure whether it’s going to work out” [13(543)]. Embedded within his brief note on withdrawal from heroin, which appeared highly significant to Steph, was the more important matter of relationship; he wanted and needed one.

### **Beginning sex work**

Despite the sadness associated with Brett, Steph continued the search for friendship and love, and made efforts to make connections with other males around his own age. There were “always rumours going around [Nundle] because I told a few people that I was gay, thinking that, you know, I could come onto them” but “they weren’t gay” [13(1060)]. However, having “put it on them”, speculation “ended up spreading” [13(1064)]. Nundle is a small country town; very little can be maintained as secret. Eventually, word reached “the older blokes [in town] and then the older blokes would come up and put it on” him for sexual favours [13(1064)].

Steph “would have been 15 or something like that” [13(375)] when he was first approached by an older man for sex. The client “was sitting on the chair in front of the hospital” [13(375)] in Nundle:

... it was one of my Dad’s old workmates, and like a few rumours and that were going around that I was gay and that and he happened to hear it. He put, it was really strange how he came up

to me. He put one foot up on the chair, like right beside me so his body was facing me and he was like really close to me and that and he was wobbling backwards and forwards and he was saying, “Oh, how about you come for a drive with me”, and I said, “Oh, how about some money, you know”. He said, “Oh well, if you just come for a drive with me out the bush I’ll give you \$50”. I said “Yeah, sweet”, you know.

**Steph 13(395)**

At 15, there was knowledge about what was happening: “I knew that he was trying to come on to me because you can tell when someone is trying to come on to you” [13(403)]. There was also a clear capacity to explore the meaning and the limits of the encounter, even on this first occasion because, “once I hopped in the car I said, ‘what do you really want?’, and he said, ‘oh, I just want you to pull me off for \$50.’” [13(399)]. There was pragmatism to Steph’s thinking about his involvement with these older men. But there was also a degree of confusion in the purpose of the encounter:

I’m not going to sleep with someone that old without getting paid for it, you know. Well, I probably would but if I could get paid for it at the same time, it’s a bonus.

**Steph 13(1064)**

Even within the context of what he regarded as his first sex work encounter, there were other desires and other thoughts about the experience. Even if payment had not been forthcoming, the sexual encounter “probably would” have occurred. Where Brian and Nick saw “older men” as clients and regarded them with some disgust, Steph “had a relationship with a 40 year old” that was “based on alcohol”. As he said, “we were alcoholics at the time” and this relationship lasted for “about eight months” [13(1072)]. Sexual experiences were different for Steph and so was sex work.

There was another more pressing issue, even for Steph at 15½ that indicated a need to respond to the overtures of these older country men. While he needed money, and his “Dad’s old workmate” [13(395)] was working and “had a lot of money”, Steph also “had a drug problem”, and “so yeah, [he] kept going back to him” [13(479)]. This occurred:

... once every two days or something, yeah, because he had a lot of money then. So I would get between \$50 and \$70 off him. There was no intercourse between us two. Like we tried once and I said, “No”, because I didn’t really like it with him. So there was a bit of oral and basically all I had to do was pull him off.

**Steph 13(483)**

So while Steph “started in Nundle”, his involvement in SMSW crossed between the city and the country because “somebody told [him] about *The Wall* ... so [he] came down [to Sydney] ... because its better money, a lot better money and [he] had to support [his drug] habit somehow” [13(391)]. Even after leaving Nundle, after his exposure to SMSW in the country, he returned for periods to maintain contact with his family. While in Nundle he continued to engage in sex work because he was able to maintain “about three mugs up there” [13(731)], all of whom were “between 40 and 50” years of age [13(735)]. His SMSW transitioned into PMSW.

While Steph regarded these encounters as work, there was another aspect to which he alluded earlier—enjoyment of and in the sexual encounter—and this appeared to coexist with a level of care and understanding for the client:

... he would be like 47 now or something, between 47 and 52 roughly say. That’s how he looks. And he still hasn’t come out of the closet. He still lives with his mother. So, yeah, it’s a bit of a tricky situation for him.

Steph 13(491)

It was a “tricky situation” for Steph’s first client, and an issue about which Steph is cognisant and sensitive. However, there *was* a boundary. It was viewed as work by Steph. It was not about romance but about survival; he “was just worried about the money in [his] pocket” [13(495)].

### **Framing the SMSW experience**

The development of meaning through experience and the cognitive framing of that experience—including in SMSW—is rarely static. How it is viewed at any particular moment is dependent on a number of factors, both within and outside the sex work experience. Brian and Nick viewed sex work as primarily about work. It was about the need to raise funds for substance use and survival. Further, they both had a predominantly negative perspective on the experience of sex work. Notwithstanding a similar set of life experiences such as abuse, substance use and homelessness, Steph developed a different perspective on his life experience—including the phenomenon of sex work—and this created a notably different pathway through life.

While Steph, along with other participants, acknowledged that substance use was a core reason for involvement in SMSW, another factor mediates a different perspective on the broad sex work experience for Steph:

... you know, I'm a homosexual, I'm gay and you know, I'm enjoying myself, having fun and I'm getting paid for it at the same time, you know. So I haven't got a boyfriend at the moment; well I have, I met up with one last night but I haven't had a boyfriend in years—no serious one—so I'm actually having sex, enjoying myself and yeah, getting paid. So why not do it.

**Steph 13(507)**

Sexual experience was a motivating factor, and sexual orientation appeared to mediate a different sexual experience for Steph within SMSW. His preference for gay sex was clear:

I got it up and I done it with the girls but it just didn't appeal, I couldn't blow. That's, I've only done it twice and I couldn't blow. I was going for three hours, one of them, and I still didn't blow after three hours. Usually, like, I can't do it to other people because I blow straight away but with a woman, yeah, I can go all night because it doesn't appeal to me.

**Steph 13(816)**

His sexual orientation appeared to allow him to experience SMSW out of a different frame of reference to that experienced by others. Where their sexual orientation is heterosexual, bisexual, or where they are confused, negativity prevails. For Steph, the sex within the work was pleasurable rather than something that must be endured. However, he was far from absolutist about this position.

There are clarifications that are made by Steph around how he framed sex work. SMSW was “enjoyable” with “the cute ones of course; the ones who are good at what they do”. He notes that part of the enjoyment arises because his clients are good at their part of the equation, the giving of pleasure to Steph. Another classification appears to be that “when you get the really big fat mug, you know, yeah, it's not very fun then” [13(515)]. So, for Steph, the conclusion was:

I try and do with the mugs, right, I try and, with the cute ones, I try and work my way in and get them as a regulars so that they come back to me all the time.

**Steph 13(527)**

There was an attempt at crafting his client base in SMSW so that he had a list of regulars that were cute. The crafting process appeared somewhat successful: “I had a few of them because

they have only wanted me, you know, I am good at what I do; so they have come back to me and I sweet-talk them” [13(527)]. For Steph, this is the perfect scenario.

Notwithstanding the variable nature of clients, and that sexual pleasure was imperative to the task at hand, Steph appeared able and willing to explore other layers of meaning within the sex work experience: “it’s not just all about sex, you know” [13(527)]. Steph provided a detailed example of his willingness to explore the sex work relationship beyond the limited bounds defined by the need for cash and sexual pleasure.

At the time of the interview, Steph had not worked *The Wall* for two weeks as a result of beginning a methadone program. Even so, there was a desire to maintain contact with one “regular” client: “his name is Warwick. He’s actually in a wheelchair. He’s had a stroke and only half of his body works” [13(555)]. The relationship was sex work. It started at *The Wall* but was no longer confined to that limited frame of reference:

... like I make him feel really good about himself. Like he told me that I gave him the inspiration to walk again, like in a pool. Like he actually did take a couple of steps and he said to me that I was the one who gave him the inspiration to walk, and he hasn’t walked in three years. So that made me feel really good about myself.

Steph 13(559)

This sex work experience was more complex than indicated in the literature on sex work or by many of the participants. It crossed the boundary established by the need for cash or even sexual pleasure. A broad level of affection and support, given to another, was a significant aim of this broadly defined sex work experience:

Just by showing him affection. You know, that’s all that he wanted was affection. He can’t even get it up or anything, you know, all he does is likes to play with me a little bit and you know. But what he wants is good company and he takes me out to dinner, like spends \$150 on my meal and then gives me \$150 to take home. So this is every night.

Steph 13(563)

There was a transaction occurring. It was clearly sex work that has transitioned from SMSW to PMSW. It had a commercial flavour, and Steph was appreciative of the financial gain. However, another layer of meaning was present in the transaction. It was the exchange of good company, affection and the sense of self-worth that arose in each person through the encounter:

I went down there about seven days ago but he was just going out and he said come back in five days because he was going on a holiday for five days but I haven't been down there yet. So I want to give him a ring and yeah, hook back up with him. It made me feel really good when he said that I was the one who gave him the inspiration to walk

**Steph 13(567)**

Beyond the sense of worth and goodness that is given and felt, obligation was another thread that appeared to be part of the encounter that was desired by both Steph and Warwick:

Well, I don't want to just leave him in the lurch. You know, I care about other people. I'm not just a person just after number one. I do care about number one first, I always put myself first but I do care about people and he is a really, really lovely man. Like to spend \$150 on my meal and then give me \$150 to take home. You know. Lends me his clothes. His \$900 silk shirt, just to go out to dinner with him. He is a multi-millionaire. He was the manager of [a shopping chain] for all of Australia. He had this stroke three years ago. Hasn't been able to walk or anything since.

**Steph 13(579)**

Care of the other was a significant aspect of the encounter and a motivating factor in the ongoing contact. There was "not really" anything "sexual" that Steph received from the contact [13(591)]. It did not fit with his earlier claim that he desired sex with "cute" clients. However, there was a negotiated contact and negotiated pleasure in the encounter between Steph and Warwick:

Like he pulls me off; he is good at that too, he would have to be I suppose. He can't even get it up himself, so. And he said, like, 'cause I didn't know whether I was pleasing him or not because he couldn't get it up. But that's through the stroke and that and he said it pleases him to see me be happy; so like, to be pleased with the sex work or whatever, you know. As long as I blow, he's happy, basically, to put it bluntly.

**Steph 13(591)**

Steph was happy having contact with Warwick because it satisfied a need within him to care for others and in so doing, to gain an income. Even within the context of ceasing substance use, leaving SMSW, and developing a different lifestyle, he wanted to maintain contact with Warwick. Money and sexual pleasure appeared as two of the motivating factors in the plan to maintain contact. However, it goes further. Steph defined another driving principle, much earlier in the interview, when he said that, "it's not just all about sex, you know. Some people are just lonely and they want comfort and affection. So I give them that as well." [13(527)]. This factor was immediately connected with another motivating force. As he said a number of times throughout the interview, "I wanted to be a counsellor. So that sort of fits in there. I tell them

what they want to hear and they can build up their self-esteem, you know' [13(531)]. It is a confused definition of the counselling experience but the intention to *do good* is clear.

The contact with clients was not simply about sex or the culturing of people that is necessary in order to maintain a list of regulars within or outside the context of SMSW. It was *about* them, the clients, and how they felt about themselves. It was also about Steph's life and his future:

If I can help them with their problems through my experiences, you know, where I stuffed up, you know, like if I can help them get through their problems, it helps me. I don't know why but it does. That's why I'd like to be a counsellor I suppose.

Steph 13(1096)

Whether it is a goal that becomes reality or whether it simply remains a guiding thought-line or movement in his various activities, Steph has discovered a way and means of crafting a positive experience out of an activity that others can only experience as negative. This occurred not just because he was able to remove the dissonance between sexual orientation and sexual expression. He appeared also able to craft an appreciation of otherness — even in clients. This allowed for a fine-grained assessment and a targeting of people for the purpose of SMSW. This enhanced the prospect that he would be able to respond to them with a sensitive appreciation of their place in the sex work encounter and in life generally.

This is one detailed example of how Steph creatively explored ways of dealing with and removing experiential and cognitive dissonance in his life. The ability to cognitively *reframe critical experience*, and therefore explore anew the events of life, has been a requirement for Steph in the face of other experiences that he and others involved in SMSW also share.

### **Reframing critical experience**

A common theme for many of the participants was that ongoing substance use was a significant motivation in SMSW. For Steph, there was a prior experience of sexual abuse, or "rape" as he refers to it. However, his way of framing the experience is important to note:

DL: Who was that by?

Steph: My cousin. Doesn't it always happen in the family?

DL: How old was he?

Steph: He was 18 or something and I was about say nine.

DL: And what happened?

Steph: Well, he told me to shut my mouth and not say anything and he made me give him oral and he gave me oral and tried to stick his dick in me but it was too big and you know.

DL: What's that like for you having that memory?

Steph: Pretty horrible, but I got over it. I got over it; I moved on.

DL: Does it return to you at all or is it ...

Steph: Yeah, I think about it every now and again but I'm not going to let it get me down.

**Steph 13 (956-976)**

The experience was negative and the memory “horrible”, but Steph was also required to mount a response to the experience regardless of whether it was positive or negative. Steph was able to reframe the experience—“I got over it. I moved on. I'm not going to let it get me down”—and it is this reframing that made a difference to his general experience in life. Steph recognised the inherent negativity in the experience but also recognised that it must not overwhelm him. He must control the meaning of the experience and the negativity must be shunned so that he is able to “move on”.

At a young age, Steph developed ways of coping and managing difficult physical and emotional experiences. These methods were reaffirmed through experience. His dominant response became a recurring theme and a defined strategy in his effort to manage experience and emotion. For Steph,

If something shitty happened yesterday, I wipe out yesterday and, you know, be concerned about today. You know. Like I just try and move on. There is no point in dwelling on something. If you can fix it, fix it. If you can't, block it out. You know. There's no point dwelling on it for months or whatever, you know. I prefer to be a happy person than someone miserable all the time.

**Steph 13(455)**

While some of the participants become enmeshed with the negative experiences—such as sexual abuse—Steph refused to frame the “horrible” experience as an ongoing part of his life. Thus, other events became the driving force in his ongoing responses in life. Steph excised the

experience out of his life, because there is “no point in dwelling on something” that is a negative experience. As a consequence of differing ways of reframing critical experience, involvement in SMSW is different for each person.

### Framing orientation

There is another factor that may assist in understanding the different ways that early sexual, and later sex work, experiences are understood and utilised. Steph retained a negative framing of his early experience of sexual abuse. He also feels sadness when he observes young males working *The Wall*:

Well, it saddens me in a way, but I was doing it myself. You know, like, I hate seeing the 14 year olds up there because I know what I was going through when I was that age and doing it, you know ... when I see the young boys, good-looking bright boys, 14 years old, working *The Wall*, it does upset me

Steph 13(755, 779)

While Steph was saddened by the presence of “good looking bright boys” at *The Wall*, he framed his own experience in a way that alleviated his angst about such events. At 20, sex—even with clients—was transformed into a pleasurable experience:

DL: When did it change from being something that you “had to do” to something you want to do?

Steph: Once I got used to intercourse.

DL: When do you think that happened?

Steph: Not that long ago. Only say eight months ago really, between 8 and 12 months ago [at age 19]. That’s the first time that I actually let somebody get into me. I’ve tried before, when I was younger, but they only got one stroke, you know, and then I said, “get out, get out!”, but then I let somebody like do it all the way, because they only had a small dick and that, and I actually enjoyed it and I have worked my way up, you know. Someone gradually a bit bigger, someone gradually a bit bigger and now I enjoy it. There’s a lot of G spots there.

Steph 13(789-796)

When Steph talked about early or premature sexualisation, it was clearly defined by him as abuse and he regards it negatively. When he spoke of his early time of working at *The Wall*, it was regarded as a negative experience because it was inevitably mixed up with other negative events. These included such experiences as homelessness, poverty, and the first flurry of

substance use, with the ensuing chaos this mostly generated. While other participants struggled and were overwhelmed by guilt, shame and the toxic fog of substance abuse, Steph—with his own “horrible” memories—mounted a determined effort to excise and overcome negative thinking. Finally, while other participants loathed selling sex, partly because they identified as heterosexual, and partly because it commodified their bodies, Steph felt negative about selling sex but was nonetheless able to develop more positive experiences and outcomes. This occurred because the MSW experiences were set against his general approach to life: that he will overcome adversity. It was also because he developed a capacity to choose his clients and gain sexual pleasure and ego strength from involvement with them. Steph identified as homosexual and this appeared to make a difference in SMSW and PMSW.

### **Future directions**

Steph provided a very clear picture of how he viewed the future, not from what he wished to achieve, but more from what he desired to avoid in his life:

Yes, but now that I have come to Sydney I have seen like the 50 year olds walking around, 70 year olds walking around on the street and they're screaming out at themselves, you know, I don't want to end up like that. And *The Wall* boys that can't work the wall any more, you know, because they're too old and they've just turned into really horrible junkies that look horrid, you know. It's disgusting seeing people like that and when I see the young boys, good-looking bright boys, 14 years old, working *The Wall*, it does upset me.

**Steph 13(779)**

Joining a methadone program provided access to a clearer level of thinking, and this allowed him to at least begin to dream about the future. In this future:

I want basically what anybody wants. A little house on the prairie, you know. I just want, I want a nice little home, I want to be married some day, I do want to have a child, whether that means adopting.... I do want to adopt a child and I want to live a normal life, like a heterosexual couple would. You know, but I want to be married to a man. I suppose that's everyone's dream at the end, isn't it .... Yeah, just having a normal life. I want to be able to please my partner.... I've got so much love to give for one person, you know, and I just want, I want to give it. I want to make him the most important thing in my life.

**Steph 13(936, 940, 944, 948)**

A house and home, marriage to a man, an adopted child, pleasure and love for the other, a normal life; Steph represented a minority within the participant group within this research. He was able to enjoy an activity that others barely tolerated and mostly abhorred. He was able to reframe negative childhood, adolescent and young adult experiences so they could not irreparably prevent his progress. He was able to excise the negative experiences because the desire to be a happy person motivated his reframing of experience. A positive outcome appeared achievable if substance use could be avoided or controlled. Arresting negative development appeared possible for Steph because he could join with people to help bring about change. Methadone was one such productive collaborative alliance. What was most significant about Steph was that despite challenging and sometimes destructive experiences, he remained able to dream of a future.

## Profile 4: James

**A sudden loss of home, family and innocence, all in one day.  
Sex work becomes a necessity.  
A long term career is crafted at *The Wall*, and in his home,  
Of necessity, in part, because of illness.**

### Prologue

While Steph identified as homosexual and this influenced his pathway through the various experiences in life, other participants, who also identify as being gay, relate to the world around them in a different way and hence navigate different pathways forward. James (26) was one of three people who wanted to be interviewed in their own home. For James, this was a public housing bed-sitter apartment situated in a building seven minutes walk from *The Wall*. Other experiences made the interview notable. I sat on a chair with recording equipment at his small two-seater dining room table facing James and his unkempt bed—the place of his work.

The interview was more focussed than any other interview in this research. There was no lead in, no working up to the topic of sex work, and no consideration of other issues that may have been related to sex work. James had agreed to an interview with a specific focus, and that was what was going to happen, and nothing else. At least that is what he indicated at the beginning. Unlike other participants in this chapter, and within this research, I came away with very little detail about James' personal life. He was not rude; he simply had no desire to discuss his private life. As he said right at the beginning when I asked him about why he left home at between 16 and 17:

I'm just hesitant to go into too much detail about that because the subject here is sex work and that's sort of more in the category of private stuff ... suffice to say it was just time to leave. I did and yeah.

James 9(47)

The issue of boundaries dominated my thinking because his limits influenced our interview, and his experience in sex work. Another final element to the interview was the presence of his pet

Rainbow Lorikeet (a native Australian bird) flying freely around a small apartment, occasionally landing peacefully, and leaving its own mark on the proceedings.

### **Leaving home**

James lived with his father and step-mother in Melbourne until he was 17½, approximately 1,000 kilometres away from *The Wall*. He is unclear how old he was when first he came to Sydney for a brief visit. He believes he was 16 at the time. During that fleeting one night visit to the inner city, he met a couple of people “and then had very little to do with the area for basically the next year, year and a half, because I returned to Melbourne and was living with my parents” [9(31)]. He left the family home in a hasty fashion: “I just had the clothes that I had, that I was wearing and no cash or anything like that, and that is what I left with. So it was unplanned, so I guess anything that is unplanned can be more difficult because it is unplanned” [9(39)].

There was recognition of the difficulty that such a sudden change produced, but no emotion in the description. It was not possible to gather more insight into his situation at home, only that his exit was not planned: “it was just a case of there being no further options. No options available to me. No other family members that I could have perhaps gone and stayed with and it was not possible to continue living with those who I had been living, which was my father and my stepmother” [9(43)]. We had gone into an area beyond his expectation for this interview (on male sex work) and this is where the discussion of “private stuff”, no matter how related it may have been, was arrested.

### **The pathway in**

Having been evicted from his family home, and realising there were “no other family members” he could live with, survival was imperative. At 17½, James turned to other contacts he had made in Melbourne:

I left, as I just mentioned, with just the clothes that I was wearing and with no cash. I went to St Kilda because I was thinking of a female that I'd met whilst waiting for a tram one day who lived in St Kilda and she was a sex worker and quite a nice woman. She would have been, I guess, old as far as sex workers go, like around 40.

**James 9(51)**

There was no mention of welfare services or professional involvements — government or non-government agencies. An accidental meeting with a relatively unknown person became the pathway forward for James. He was homeless and in need of immediate assistance:

So the afternoon that I left home, I went to St Kilda and went to go into the boarding house in which she lived. They wouldn't allow guests so I waited outside and then about seven hours later or thereabouts she came out and I asked her if I could stay with her.

**James 9(59)**

Evident in his seven hour wait was a level of persistence (perhaps desperation) indicative of significant need combined with urgency and determination. This need, arising from the “unplanned” nature of his movement from home, appeared to block caution, awareness of potential danger, or the presence of other more mainstream alternatives. He made a pragmatic decision. His patience and pragmatism were rewarded, but the offer of housing was conditional:

She agreed but also told me that it was conditional, that it was contingent on my earning enough money to at least pay half of the cost of the room which her and I were to share and also pay for all sorts of other expenses

**James 9(59)**

Very rapidly, and after a casual meeting at a tram stop in central Melbourne, James was given housing, with conditions, and a pathway to follow that allowed for the fulfilment of those conditions.

So she suggested that I work in the sex industry. She told me that next to Luna Park there was a street called Shakespeare Grove and that if I went down there that, I think in her words, she said that I would do well and so that was my introduction.

**James 9(63)**

From homelessness to housing and from school student to sex worker; this was a sudden, rapid and major life-change. It was also the breaking of other new ground because he “hadn't ever had any sort of sexual experience prior to this” [9(67)], apart from “fumbling in the back shed” [9(315)] with a mate when he was five years of age.

His female sex worker friend directed him towards sex work, knowing that a young looking, blonde haired, blue eyed boy of 17½ years would have little trouble making money on the street. He had no experience and no instruction about sex work. He was simply directed to an area. But as James indicated, "... what determines whether or not you could get the job is not based on how experienced you are but rather how you look. That's what influences the client's initial decision and so I did do okay, certainly" [9(75)].

### **Defining SMSW**

Being small in stature, young and beautiful can attract clients in sex work. In addition, if you have personality, manners and awareness, and some sensitivity, it also brings with it an adoring client group. For James, "there are some clients that are sort of fawning, who will repeat the same flattering compliment over and over again. Whether it be, 'oh you're so beautiful' or 'you are so, whatever' " [9(79)]. James was detached from these comments and very clear that the flattery was not real. In this area he was rational, realistic and pragmatic about clients and the connection between these comments and his real sense of self:

But I don't think that genuinely makes any difference as to how the individual, in this case me, how I view myself. I don't have my self-esteem inflated by any compliments I may receive from clients and by the same token my self-esteem isn't deflated during times when a client may be unhappy with me or may be dismissive or whatever.

**James 9(79)**

Unlike Steph who placed significance on being able to offer and receive feedback that helped build up and sustain self-worth, James was detached from—and perhaps even cynical about—these types of exchanges.

This was not the only area of clarity for James in respect of sex work. He had a clear sense of who the clients were and what the relationship was about:

They're all varied, all different, as all people are different. The thing that I guess they all have in common is that they are paying me for my time. The reason I don't say paying me for sex is because it doesn't necessarily involve sex. They are paying me for my time. That's really the only concrete thing that they all have in common.

**James 9(91)**

There is no simplistic definition of sex work here. For James, SMSW was about a package of services that he provided to a varied group of men who have differences and similarities. The common denominator between each client was that they buy his time. However, time is not granted until an assessment occurs.

### **Assessment and experience in SMSW and PMSW**

Although there were common features to clients and the transactions that occurred between James and his clients, not all potential clients were accepted. There was an assessment process in which James engaged in order to decide who would qualify as a client. To understand the assessment process it is important first to understand the origin of his clients. He does not “advertise”. His client group “would be a 50/50 split between clients that I meet on the streets of Darlinghurst, and clients that I already know that seek me out and come here and see me” [9(191)].

While they all originated from the street, and this was the source of new clients, he retained clients that he met on the street, and these became regulars. They formed half of his work in MSW. In order for them to qualify to be new referrals, and perhaps regulars, James carried out his assessment, which was based largely on categories of people with whom he would not work:

There are quite often people that are potential clients that I will see out on the street but I will make a decision either before speaking with him or after a brief conversation with them that I don't want to do a job with them. That's usually based on; I don't know whether you'd call it an intuitive thing. We all get a sense of someone, the person that we are speaking to or the person we are looking at based on various things like the way they dress, the way they look at you, the way they speak, the sorts of things they say.

**James 9(95)**

James was able to refine the criteria down to personal characteristics that ruled out the prospect of the person becoming a client:

So if I find the client scary in any way, someone that I wouldn't want to be around if they lost their temper because of their tremendous size; that's one type of person that I would avoid. I also avoid people that are drunk. Generally you can't help but I guess I want to steer away from

the people that are dressed or appear to be impoverished and pay more attention to the people that seem more affluent. Though I know it's sort of a hasty judgment but it's one we have to make quite quickly and you don't want to end up with someone that can't afford to pay or whatever the problem may be.

**James 9(95)**

Potentially angry, aggressive or violent clients were excluded. Drunk and impoverished people were also excluded. Thus far, the assessment process was about the protection of self and income. There was one group that James pinpointed who, by definition, could never be clients. They were "the final group which I discriminate against, in a lot of cases, I avoid Asian clients, not because I have a dislike for Asian people generally. In my day to day life, I come in contact with and am friendly with Asians: just as far as sex work goes" [9(95)]. James was clear about his reasoning:

When they are dealing with the person that is charging them, often it involves tedious negotiations about how much they are willing to pay and that is often a 10 or 15 minute conversation. Let's say you say \$100, they say \$40. They will just keep; maybe they'll up the amount they are willing to pay to \$50. It's just tedious going through that process. Not all but certainly a lot of Asians do that.

**James 9(95)**

His assessments spoke of what he wished to avoid, in this case the tedium of financial negotiations. In the past, this had been experienced as unpleasant and frustrating for James. However, it moved beyond the financial issues because "if you do get them to pay what you ask when you're actually doing the job for them it's quite different being with an Asian client [9(95)]. While the previous criteria were defined and somewhat detached from self because they dealt with practicalities, "doing the job" with Asians tells us about the experience of SMSW and also about his reaction to the intimacy of sex work:

Thai guys for example, you think that their kissing is giving you a peck on the cheek or wherever it may be but in fact they are pushing their face up against whichever part of you they are kissing and they actually inhale through their nose; so they're smelling you.

**James 9(99)**

It was a practice that James attempted to explain by saying that "it's not something they are doing under your armpits or in an area that may be smelly. It's not just so they can be sure whether or

not you're clean. I guess it's just their way" [9(99)]. This incomplete explanation pointed to a practice that he did not fully understand.

Even without a sense of understanding, this type of sex work experience was difficult for James because, while "Thai guys ... all have different ways of having sex", they are quite often "very clingy, very sort of almost overly affectionate, inappropriately affectionate" [9(107)]. He experienced it as an intrusion into a personal area and a breach of an important boundary. James had "three Thai guys at the moment who will call by here wanting to see me at any time of the day or night, leaving notes in my letterbox and that sort of thing" [9(107)]. The intrusion became more complicated because these clients transgressed boundaries that are important:

When I say wanting to see me, I don't mean wanting to see me as in do a job, I mean wanting to see me as in talk to me and see me because they tell me that they are especially fond of me and that they miss me when they're away from me and all that sort of thing.

**James 9(107)**

While he was not distressed by them, it was beyond his comprehension and he continued to search for reasons to explain their behaviour with him:

Maybe it's not Asian guys throughout the world but maybe it's just Asian guys in Australia where they may have few friends and maybe feel somewhat isolated. And as a result they may be more inclined to cling to someone that they've met, that they think they like, which in this case is me.

**James (111)**

While he attempted to understand the behaviour of his clients, he was also critical of their behaviour. James was aware that the sex work encounter was not simply about the provision of an embodied, and yet emotionally detached, sexual service. He had thoughts and ideas about what he wanted and what he did not want. While it was work, and the overt product that was selling was sex, it was more than sex that was being explored—being sold—within the context, "because it doesn't necessarily involve sex" [9(91)].

James recognised that he had developed a position on SMSW and PMSW that broadened the definition of sex work. Both he and his clients acted on this broader definition. For James, there was an encounter happening, person to person: feelings, likes and dislikes, fears,

hates, and loves. There was no escaping the intimacy so heavily embedded in the encounter, and this led to an obvious and significant conclusion that there was another person present in the experience to whom James was relating:

I am conscious that some of these people that are my clients, all of them are feeling human beings. And I am conscious of their feelings and whilst I could benefit financially from developing some sort of, you know, I guess what is best described as a sugar daddy relationship with them, tricking them by having them think that I love them and they love me and all that sort of stuff. I don't want to bring undue hurt or damage to these people and so I do my best not to hurt or manipulate them when playing with their feelings.

James 9(252)

They have feelings. He was conscious of their feelings. And they commanded respect and sensitivity. While the public parameters were generally about the selling of sex, James had an understanding of the depth and complexity of the encounter:

A lot of these guys that go on to become regulars do so because they like you. When I say like you, I mean, not because whatever it is, the sex or whatever it is you that you do together is so fantastic and that you do that so much better than anyone else. It's not for that reason that they continue to see you. It's more that the sex or whatever it is that the two of us do together is adequate or good enough and the reason they continue to see me is because they like me for various other reasons.

James 9(252)

Without being self-disparaging, James was aware of the realities of sex work beyond the formulaic representations. He realised that the sex he provided was probably reasonable or "good enough" in his terms. He also realised that the criterion of greatest interest to the client was embedded within his physicality, personality *and* demeanour. This was what his clients became attached to at the level of either realism or fantasy:

... that liking of me in the case of some clients extends beyond just liking me enough to see me regularly. Sometimes there have been cases where they actually get it confused and think that it is love.

James 9(252)

Where the common understanding of SMSW was about the selling of sex, James' descriptions pointed to a more complex reality where clients have feelings that require attention, careful handling, and respect, where that were possible:

You have got to be very aware of that [clients falling in love with James] and careful not to, well, not to let that happen and if it does happen to be as kind as you can be and certainly, as I said, not to exploit that, not to then use that, what could be perceived as a weakness, which is their

feelings for me. Not to use that to get more money or more things out of them, because the ultimate price, though I don't pay it, they can suffer quite a lot as a result especially if they're someone that is fairly isolated, has trouble meeting people and all that sort of thing. Then the first person they've met and they have become fond of for quite some time, turns out to be someone that is quite a, you know, a predatory or conniving individual. Then that can be quite devastating.

It was a thoughtful reflection on the part of James and portrays an insight into a convoluted world that was his long-standing involvement in SMSW and PMSW. His care for his clients, while still maintaining a sense that it was work, goes beyond the mere culturing of clients so they form a part of a private list. There was a sensitivity to his clients that recognises the dialogical movements evident within the encounter. Both James and his clients share a common humanity and therefore James could identify with them and act in a positive manner on the basis of this articulated common humanity. Both had needs that required attention and sex work provided the negotiated forum where both parties had their needs satisfied.

His recognition of a common humanity created an understanding of his rights but also of his obligations to clients. This was particularly within this sex work context, because the encounter “doesn't necessarily involve sex” [9(91)]. It echoes a sentiment articulated by Steph: “It's not just all about sex, you know” [13(527)].

Opening up the possibility of seeing SMSW and PMSW as an encounter with “feeling human beings” [9(252)] meant that a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon was available. We achieved a more detailed understanding of what his client needed and desired, and of what was more likely to occur within this type of sex work. In other words, we discovered a more in-depth and in-tune understanding of the person—the worker and the client—within the phenomenon. We observed that the boundaries of the encounter were stretched so that greater account was taken of the needs and desires of the client.

Clients get confused because of his sensitivity and understanding towards them. This occurs through his language and his actions. Consequently, some of them “think that it's love”. They visit out of hours and leave messages. They desire contact outside of the sex work

encounter. It was an altogether different sex work experience and one that had been sustained over almost 10 years.

Within this new and broader context and understanding of the client/worker relationship, James had a clear understanding of his place in the MSW equation. While he understood and recognised the person (i.e., the client) within the phenomenon of SMSW, and this allowed for a deep appreciation of their feelings and desires, there was also clarity for him in the boundary between worker and client. He was very clear about the boundary and the experience: “I don’t really ever meet a client and think, ‘Wow, this person would be wonderful to have some sort of loving relationship with, some sort of ongoing connection’. I can’t think of a time when that has entered my mind” [9(131)]. So, against the contextualising background of care for the other—and the confusion that this created for some clients—he knew where he and his clients stood. But here again, there is recognition of the need for mutuality with clients in these encounters:

A male sex worker has to at least show that they are enjoying themselves to an extent. Because if a male sex worker fails to get an erection, that may be fine by 5 or 10 per cent of clients I’d say 5 per cent would be the extent of it but the remaining 95 per cent are just as keen on satisfying you as they are on satisfying themselves.

**James 9(151)**

Whether or not he enjoyed the sex work experience—and “in the vast majority of cases” [9(155)] this was not the case—he still retained a high level of sensitivity to the needs and desires of the client. He therefore had a particular understanding of at least one experience and one outcome for him from this stretching of the boundaries in MSW:

They being the clients, they certainly do their best, most of them certainly do their best to try to see to it that I do get as much out of it as they do. In fact a lot of clients, for a lot of clients that I have spoken to, the difference between a job that goes well and a job that doesn’t go well is whether or not the guy [MSW] enjoys himself and whether or not the guy [MSW] is into it or not.

**James 9(155)**

Thus, he actively and passively participated in the MSW experience. He allowed the client to stimulate him and worked hard to respond to that stimulation, because this was what it meant, in

part, to be sensitive to and service clients. If the client needed and desired to have James enjoy the experience, that was what he aimed to achieve for the client.

There was another way that James respected his clients, placing their needs above his own desires. It was in respecting the limits placed by the client on the encounter:

A story that illustrates that is, there was a guy that would have been I guess in his mid-20s or thereabouts who picked me up and we went back to his place and he wanted to wrestle, wanted us to wrestle wearing white briefs, which we did. He was very attractive in my opinion and after we wrestled for some time I was thinking of ways to suggest, “Well, why don’t we do something else; why don’t lose these, you know, briefs?” But he just wanted to wrestle, wanted us to wrestle wearing these white briefs and that was the job and that was what we did.

James 9(131)

Going beyond what was asked for by the client is something that does not occur. James drew, what for him, was an important boundary between thought and action. For him, “some form of sex was what I was wanting or thinking about” [9(147)] and “I wanted it for my benefit” [9(143)], but the thought did not proceed to action because the client did not want it to proceed in that direction.

The flexibility of boundaries was a complex matter for James. While he allowed or encouraged—and sometimes even facilitated—the stretching of boundaries out of respect for and in accommodation of the client, the boundaries around his own personal experiences with new and regular clients appeared quite strict. The setting of boundaries acted as an assessment tool and practice guidelines for involvement in SMSW and PMSW. They filtered out those with whom such stretching of boundaries would prove most problematic. As a consequence of the development of boundaries, what he was able to do in sex work, and what he allowed to occur within SMSW and PMSW, was extended. In other words, and unlike Brian during his time at *The Wall*, by having a solid assessment that filters out unacceptable clients, James was left with a client group where the boundaries—while strict—were quite broad. Working from home and working with the emotional content of his clients became manageable because of his established boundaries.

## The environment of MSW

Street-based sex work at *The Wall* is inherently unsafe. It is an exposed environment and people get hurt within that place. Brian has previously described the difficulty of standing on a street corner, being leered at and abused by all manner of passers by. James also experienced potentially dangerous events in SMSW. He “had experiences where [he had] gone back to someone’s place with them and there [was] another person in the house hiding in a wardrobe and that sort of thing” [9(240)].

On that basis, he attempted to exercise control by limiting the potential for harm to self through ambush and injury. His primary strategy was to utilise a place with which he was most familiar. Thus, “I am taking them into my home but it’s just a hell of a lot safer that way, as well as convenient because I am so close [to *The Wall*]” [9(240)]. I pressed the point that taking an unknown person into his home inevitably increased the possibility of long term difficulties because there was no longer any residential privacy. James responded by saying, “yes, but you have to weigh that up against the risks involved in going into someone else’s inner sanctum” [9(199)].

It appeared that, most of the time, the gamble to take the client home payed off. However, there were incidents where difficulties emerged when a client “abused the privilege” [9(203)] of being in his home:

It was a weeknight, like a Monday or a Tuesday, and it was sort of 4am or thereabouts, very late .... A guy that I met that seemed quite nice, I brought back here. He’d given me the money that I’d asked for and then asked for penetrative sex .... What he paid me wasn’t really that much money in my opinion and I didn’t feel that for that amount of money he deserved to receive penetrative sex. But beyond that, I wasn’t in the mood to and I didn’t want to engage in penetrative sex, so I said no. We discussed it for a while; we reached an impasse. We had already done the job, as far as I was concerned by that point anyway. His time was up; I opened the door for him to leave. He stood in the doorway and continued trying to convince me.

James 9(203-207)

At that point, and at an early hour of the morning, the potential for harm to be caused to James escalated because the client had become argumentative and refused to leave:

Then finally he reached, I can't remember exactly where he reached but somewhere on his body, he reached and pulled out a knife that he had with him and brandished it. He said words to the effect of, "What do you think of this?" I think that's what he said. In self-defence I stabbed him twice and he took off.

**James 9(207)**

A confined space, an argumentative and threatening client who refused to leave; they may have simply been threats, but James took them seriously and responded as if the threats were real and danger imminent. That said, there was awareness on James' part of the potential for danger, and as far as possible, he was ready to respond:

Sometime before that, maybe five minutes before this happened I was beginning to get a sense that this guy was unhappy and getting rid of him may have been a problem. So I was fully dressed and I actually had tucked away a knife on me just in case. I had no intention of harming him in any way unless it was absolutely necessary but it was, sort of, one of these "just in case" things and when he did pull out his knife ... I was able to, as it were, hurt him before he hurt me.

**James 9(215)**

When his boundaries are broken by a client, it represents a breach of trust and understanding. Violence occurs, and James is able to inflict a level of harm sufficient (in his mind) to protect himself, and to restore his own safety:

It was certainly an experience that could have been very, very serious. Not that it wasn't serious, in that he was stabbed, but serious in the sense that I also could have been seriously injured.

**James 9(219)**

Care of self became a major priority. It was not as if care of the other was totally dismissed, however, care of self overwhelmed his thoughts and his actions. What was notable in James was that even after this negative encounter—which caused harm to another person—he still opted for working from home as his preferred option. His rationale for this decision was clear:

It's the lesser of two evils. Obviously, ideally going to a hotel room would be the best option but going back to a client's place, you don't know what is waiting for you back there. You don't know who else is back there. You don't know the place that you are in, in the house or whatever; you don't know the area. And you don't know what he has back there in terms of, as I said, other people or weapons and or whatever it may be, whereas if just one individual comes with me back here then it is just one individual.

**James 9(236)**

This graphic example points to a significant element of SMSW, and to a lesser extent PMSW. It is a dangerous activity in which to engage. Each and every new encounter carries with it the

potential for harm to self and others. Safety was his responsibility. James was aware of this and, to the extent that he could be, he was proactive about it:

Just so you understand, in terms of looking after one's safety, you're in a far better position to see to your own safety and well-being in your own home than you are in someone else's home. I used to go back to clients' homes with them but I learned a very valuable lesson.

James 9(231)

Notwithstanding the incident, his judgement about SMSW and PMSW remained the same. The environment for MSW, in either form, was home. While James worked alone and these positive and negative relationships were of significance in his life, there have been other relationships, and these too interact with the MSW experience.

### **Other relationships and MSW**

Despite encouragement to the contrary, there was very little information that James shared about his past. His family, friends, and other intimate relationships all remained quite mysterious. For Brian, Nick and Steph, there was ample information provided about either a relationship in the present, in the past, or at least the desire they each held for a close intimate relationship. For James, this was another example of where the boundaries were very clear. However, some information was forthcoming.

James has friendships, and these friendships have an unspecified degree of intimacy and some influence over him. At the beginning, and while he was at home, there was "my friendship with someone that I had met [in Sydney] that had themselves spent quite a bit of time in the inner city" [9(31)]. No other information was available, so I am unsure if this was an ordinary event or his first encounter with sex work, an experience that may have encouraged his first contact with female and then male sex work back in Melbourne after he first left home.

Of more recent friendships, he indicated that "there are a lot of people in my life that I have love for and they also have love for me" [9(355)], but again there was little detail. Even after further questions aimed at encouraging further exploration, the most that was available was,

“Yes, friends and some family” [9(359)]. Asked whether there were people with whom he felt a particular fondness, his simple response was, “sure” [9(367)]. Again, when encouraged to extend his response, the most that was available was, “The majority of them would be male. There is only one female that I have among my close friends. A lot of them would be around my own age, however certainly not all of them. Some of them are older than I am” [9(371)]. These unknown people are “friends that I have had for many years; people that I am close to that I was close with six or seven years ago and still am very close to” [9(387)]. So there is some stability and longevity in his personal relationships.

James lived and worked alone: “I do need or want—I don’t know whether it’s a need or a want—a fair amount of alone time” [9(355)]. Clarifying this further, he indicated that he had no partner or lover at the time of the interview, “and the reason for that is because I think sex work is, being a sex worker is incompatible with being in a relationship, and certainly in the past, when I have been in relationships, I’ve ceased being a sex worker” [9(279)].

James was last in a relationship when he was somewhere between 19 and 21: “I was in a relationship for maybe 18 months or 2 years, so I didn’t work during that time” [9(339)]. The rule in this area of his life was also clear as was the rationale for the boundary:

If every human being has a certain quota, a certain need to be touched, stroked and adored and also has a sexual need, but everybody has a yearning for it but also everybody can receive their fill of it, then if I were to arrive home and my boyfriend were to start touching me, not necessarily in a way which was going to lead on to sex, I would start to feel, “look, I understand that you need this now”, because assuming he isn’t in the sex industry, then he hasn’t had anybody touch him or be close to him or hug him and stroke him and all that sort of thing, whereas I have, and I’ve had my fill of it for that day whereas he may not have.

**James 9(283)**

Boundaries are about expectations, limits, and establishing an understanding about capacity. James, while he was engaged in MSW, knew that he reached the limit of his capacity for receiving (and presumably giving) “touch” and other forms of physical affection through the sex work experience. Rather than constantly confronting the internal conflict that was produced for him because of involvement in either SMSW or PMSW, he decided, in a pragmatic fashion, to choose one or the other experience, but never both simultaneously. This was further clarified when

James equated the touch and affection he received through MSW with that which he received in a personal intimate relationship:

Yes. I mean not that I have a clear understanding of any needs, intimacy, that I may have but if everybody needs to be touched, and when I say touched I mean touched in a loving affectionate way, then yes, almost all clients will touch me in a loving, affectionate way.

James 9(287)

Without comprehending his own emotional needs with any clarity or certainty, he recognised that all people need to be “touched in a loving affectionate way” and that he had an ongoing need to experience this as well. However, for James, this can be gained either through sex work or through a personal relationship. The outcome, in terms of affection, is the same in both situations. It is a radical position, and one that radically separates his experience of MSW in any form from that of Brian, Nick or Steph, all of whom seek relationships away from sex work because they are different and never the same.

### **Sexual exhaustion**

Although James was able to state with clarity that intimacy within sex work could be a good replacement for the intimacy he could receive in a personal intimate relationship, there was another angle to be explored in respect of emotional needs and the connection with sex work. When asked to clarify what he meant by aligning the two types of intimacy, he stated with some force, “Look, again, I’m not clear on what my needs for emotional intimacy are. Frankly, after being a sex worker for as long as I have...” [9(291)]. Although I inadvertently interrupted his train of thought in order to try and clarify what he meant, he returned to the point saying,

There is a part of me which, well, not just a part of me; I don’t feel drawn toward, you know, like in a nightclub setting or whatever. Whereas, some people may be looking around thinking, “Wow, look at all these gorgeous people, gee I’d love to get to know one of them. Gee, that one in particular. It would just be ideal if we were to end up together”.

James 9(295)

James was clear that this is not him. He was not the person who felt attraction to people such that he went to clubs to seek a partner. Sex work has had an impact on him in respect of his understanding of personal intimate partnerships. For James,

I almost would go so far as to say, I said almost go so far as to say, that I've had enough sex. And right at the moment I need a break from the sex because I've learned in the past that when I reach this point, I need a break from sex and after having a break for a time then my desire to have sex—I'm talking about in my private life here—will return. But certainly at the moment, it almost wouldn't matter who it was or how wonderful they were. I could look at them and see them as attractive and I could find them attractive in many ways but whether or not I'd be prepared to engage in any sort of sexual relationship with them would be another thing altogether.

James 9(299)

As a result of an intense and lengthy involvement with SMSW and PMSW, James reached his limit. There was no desire for private sex, and this loss of desire also impacted on his desire for private intimacy. James had a particular point, about which there was no lack of clarity:

At the moment I feel exhausted. I don't mean physically exhausted. I just mean I feel as though I have exhausted that side of myself and that the times recently when I have had sex in my private life, it has felt a little bit like a job in that yes, I'm there and yes, I'm doing it. But you know, whilst there are, maybe half the time, I'm in the moment, so to speak, in the moment and enjoying myself, the other half of the time, I'm feeling, "Gee, this is feeling a little bit like a job, isn't it". Then without meaning to, I look over at the clock and think, "Gee, I wonder how much longer this is going to go for".

James 9(299)

The exhaustion arises because of his over exposure to sexual intimacy and its connection with a need to work. This influenced the way he related to the world around him, outside of the sex work environment:

Everybody that, most everyone that lives in and around Darlinghurst, they're walking about and living their lives with it somewhere in their mind, that sex with someone good looking or cute would be nice .... When I walk down the street I am oblivious to who's good-looking and who's not. If I were to be in a room and having a conversation with two people, one of which was attractive and one that was unattractive, then yes, I could certainly tell the difference. But when I'm walking down the street, it's as though through over exposure to sex it's become something, which certainly on a day to day basis, isn't there for me the way it is for most other people.

James 9(303)

For James, the disinterest was about the sheer volume of sex and the longevity of his involvement in MSW, both of which have had a clear impact:

You see that sexual side, the whole host of people, and it's no longer a mysterious enticing thing. It's something which is just as familiar as many, many other things in life and when something has lost its mystique, then that's gone and it's lost its desirability to a large extent.

James 9(307)

So difference marks his experience of himself, others and his world, and this was driven home through involvement in SMSW and PMSW. His ultimate desire was therefore also logical and clear:

If it were my choice I would have quit. If it was my choice, I never would have done it at all. I know that if someone wants to not do something, then, just stop doing it. If they said "Oh but I need the money that I get from sex work", well the easy answer to that is get another job, which I have done.

James 9(463)

The desire was not to remain in sex work but to leave. Exposure to sex has come at a price, one that leads to exhaustion. There were other impacts or consequences of his involvement in MSW. The emphasis that was placed—be it positive or negative—was dependent on how he thought and spoke of the experience at the time. What was clear, however, was that *other forms of work* were a *pathway out* of male sex work.

### Pathways out, or not

At the time of the interview James indicated that he had "10 regulars, I suppose. So that's 10 people that I guess, on average, I would see each one once a fortnight" [9(244)]. That said, there was also no doubt that he had sought and gained other employment during the years that he had worked in MSW. As he indicated,

I worked for a superannuation company for a time. But I didn't tell the people that; the guy that employed me, I didn't tell him that I was a schizophrenic and so I sort of came into work for a while psychotic one day and there was a clause in my contract that said you could be dismissed for bad behaviour. And I didn't do anything that bad but they dismissed me.

James 9(463)

While he was on, as he puts it, "a fairly high dose of a drug" to treat his schizophrenia, gaining and maintaining other employment after he was "dismissed" was difficult.

And I got a job a week or so later in an office in the city somewhere and the same thing happened. And so that's sort of the problem that I encounter when it comes to day jobs. Not just day jobs, I mean legitimate work in that sort of sense and I guess that's where I feel somewhat trapped in that.

**James 9(463)**

Although he desired to be involved in “legitimate work”, his mental health issues caused a level of instability that created an impasse in respect of participation in mainstream work. He felt “somewhat trapped” within the sex work scene in spite of his articulated desire to have never been involved in sex work.

While there may be cause to feel sorrow for, or sadness with, James, having stated so clearly and strongly that “if it were my choice I would have quit. If it was my choice, I never would have done it” [9(463)], this was not the approach that he took to his predicament. In the first instance, he was clear about the different types of sex work around the globe:

Some people feel sorry for sex workers. In the past I have pointed out to people that sure, feel sorry for those people that, you know, may be taken from their village by force and enslaved and forced to work as prostitutes.

**James 9(451)**

He also understood that he did not fit with this type of sex work. Even within the context of homelessness at 17½, he was aware of the fact that he made choices:

Those people that choose to work in the sex industry, those people that don't have a pimp threatening them and beating them if they don't work and all that sort of thing, so those that make a choice, such as myself, then don't pity them because it's something that they choose to do.

**James 9(451)**

Even though he recognised that there was more freedom of choice in his situation than in that of the person who is “enslaved”, or “forced” to work, or who has a “pimp” who exercises control over personal behaviour and finances, he also understands the context for those choices:

However, very few people I would imagine would ever strive to become, you know, would ever want to and strive towards becoming a sex worker. For myself, and from people that I have known, it's something that happens because of circumstances, which are usually unfortunate circumstances.

**James 9(451)**

People become engaged with, and sustained by, sex work for a variety of reasons, some of which inevitably lead them to be sustained for long periods by involvement in MSW. For James, “There was a time when the biggest drain was spending money on heroin but that is something that I haven’t done for quite a while. When I say quite a while, I mean certainly over a year” [9(415)]. While the need for money for drugs was less pressing for him at the time of the interview, he knew that there were other reasons that people become involved in SMSW. For some, it is because of “unfortunate circumstances”, such as homelessness, over which it is difficult to exercise control.

With awareness of, and insight into, the origins of MSW, he nonetheless says, “look, it’s there and it functions as; it has its part, it serves the community” [9(451)]. However, the functionality of the sex work industry does not take away from the reality that “the sex workers themselves more often than not, are profoundly unhappy or profoundly disturbed: doomed one way or another” [9(451)]. There was a strong sense of fatalism in this statement by James, that he was stuck with a personal history and mental health dilemmas that create, in an ongoing manner, an impasse in any search for a future direction or a pathway out of SMSW and PMSW. With that in mind, and given that he decided to remain within the sex work scene, he must try to develop a positive framework for his ongoing involvement.

There are really lovely people that are out there as clients: that go beyond just being good clients in the sense that they pay well and that they respect you. They are just genuinely nice people, that it is a pleasure to have met and to continue to know and that’s true of a whole lot of clients. In fact, it’s because of that, because of their virtues such as kindness and the way in which they’re generous, it’s because of that that a lot of those young, straight guys or young troubled people can survive.

**James 9(423)**

The way that James has learnt to assess clients for their capacity to relate in a certain and positive manner, and the way that he has learnt to maintain a private-list of regulars in MSW; these are the primary strategies that lead this “young troubled” person to survive his experience of SMSW or PMSW. While there may not be a pathway out of SMSW or PMSW, James seemed able to craft a

pathway through what for him was, and perhaps remains, a complex experience and core part of his existence.

## Conclusion

All of the participants profiled in this chapter shared certain common experiences. They worked at *The Wall* and they all attempted in various ways to move from SMSW to PMSW, or a combination of both modalities, in an effort to mollify the potential or actual negative elements and consequences of MSW. However, each person arrived at SMSW from a different background and while some of the elements in those backgrounds may well have been common (e.g., neglect within the family) what is important to note is the ways in which each person responded to those common elements. Abuse, by way of example, was damning or debilitating, or through reframing, viewed as a less pernicious life event. Then there were the differences, and, as would be expected, these were many and substantial in terms of their impact on the person. Perhaps what is most significant is observing how each person entered, responded to and negotiated his involvement in sex work and the corollary experiences that arose through involvement in a first event at *The Wall*.

Brian came out of an environment of doubt and ridicule and, notwithstanding the efforts he made to incorporate himself into a new and more accepting world, the doubts remained and he was consumed by the world into which he located himself. Doubt and confusion were key protagonists in his life. It was a genuine struggle for him to think about himself and his future. However, he was able to transform the SMSW experience and he entered into a new modality that placed limits on the potential for damage to arise as a consequence of involvement in sex work. At one and the same time, he continued to damage himself through his use of substances.

Nick was a creature of time and place. He emerged from a powerful cultural environment, and while he moved back and forth from and to that world, he never lost his respect for the people and the values of that dominating and value-laden environment. The people and the place are what gave him strength and purpose, notwithstanding the damaging influence they also exacted on him. The clearest reason for Nick to retain his allegiance to these people and this environment was that his involvement in MSW was acknowledged by, and accepted within, this powerful social and familial world. They did not reject him because of sex work. Since they understood the difficult choices that must be made in any person's struggle to create a future, sex work does not adversely impact on his own view of himself. Notwithstanding the powerful negative influence, so evident in his life history and cultural milieu, Nick was a grounded man.

Steph knew from an early age that he was different—a miracle—and this formed the strength with which he approached relationships and adversity. He moulded his experience, reframed its negativity and built on events to create new directions for himself. Unlike Brian, but like Nick, he learnt to use experience and the world in which he found himself to build his future directions. Within this context, even the most negative of life events were somehow relieved of their destructive sting. Regardless of his negative experiences, he appeared always able to gain a positive spin on people he met and the world around him. Unlike Brian, he was a gay male and there was no confusion about, denial of, or distaste for, this reality. This acceptance was what anchored his own thoughts about self and future.

James, the final person profiled in this chapter, held a unique place within these narratives. He experienced significant debilitation—rejection, homelessness, substance use, mental health problems, and hospitalisation—only some of which could be reframed and from which he could move on. Unlike the other participants in this chapter, there was a clear recognition within James that MSW may well be an activity from which he cannot move on. Thus, of all the participants, James was pushed to develop a future that most clearly incorporated

sex work as a long term option. As such, his thinking about sustained involvement in MSW was more sophisticated than that portrayed in the other profiles: place of work, processes of engagement, and thinking about the consequences and costs of involvement, were richly layered with understanding.

This chapter has presented four indicative narratives that unpack—both individually and together—the diversity that is SMSW. Sexual identity, backgrounds, actions, emotions, connections, attachments, coping strategies, and outcomes, are all explored in these four narratives. They are indicative of the *untold stories* that each of the participants spoke of during the 27 interviews that make up this study. While this chapter heightens our understanding of sex work practices and the diversity that appears within that phenomenon, what we mostly gain is an in-depth understanding of the person and the relationships within and around the phenomenon of male sex work. Whether it be work on the street or within the context of a private list of regular clients, navigating relationships is a key theme within these narratives. The relationships that we see are complex, multilayered, mercurial, positive and negative, and they extend throughout the life course of the person within the phenomenon of male sex work. It is the relationships in the lives of the males engaged in SMSW and PMSW that are of critical significance to them and their survival, and this is the subject of my next chapter.

## Chapter 5

### EXPLORING RELATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN SMSW

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#### Introduction

Exploring the *untold stories*—through *four indicative narratives*—has shown that involvement with sex work is a complex experience. The young male and the client are both viewed differently from event to event, and even within particular sex work events. Objectified and dismissed, respected and even honoured; it is a variable phenomenon. However, while noting the complexity inherent in these encounters, it is clear that the sex work experience is fundamentally about involvement with people, and such involvement entails relational dynamics that can be difficult for the researcher to fathom or even to define. These relationships are mercurial — a moveable feast of events and happenings that lead inevitably to different understandings, almost by the day, of the relational dynamics involved (Leary & Minichiello, 2007). This chapter focuses on research data that provide some indication of what males engaged in street-based male sex work (SMSW) think about the various relationships within their lives: prior to involvement in SMSW, as they entered the SMSW environment, during their initial and ongoing experiences, and as they leave or remain engaged in SMSW.

## Precursor relationships and SMSW

Relational experiences are critical in life generally. They are core to our very creation. They nurture early development and they inform and influence the directions we take through adolescence and adulthood. While the main thrust of this chapter is an examination of relational experiences within the context and time of SMSW, it is important to explore relational experiences occurring prior to entry into MSW. These are the significant *precursor relationships* that require understanding if any comprehension is to be had of the phenomenon of SMSW.

There is a bias within the literature towards seeing all, or most, precursor relationships as tainted or at least negative. They are seen to involve a significant level of dysfunction, disconnection and even abuse, all of which are seen as leading to serious and negative consequences. Alternative narratives are available and these point to a sudden or gradual fragmentation of the basic supports, notwithstanding the desire on the part of the carers to understand and support the person. Allan's (22) life began to fragment during his mother's cancer-related illness. British born and living in England, he was 10 when his mother died and "[his] Nan thought it would be best that [he] and [his] sister came to Australia to be with the rest of our family; [his] aunties and uncles" [8(51)]. The loss of his mother and his transportation to Australia were both "a big shock to the system at 10 years old" [8(79)].

After a few years he was no longer living with his grandmother and was "made ... a ward of the State when [he] was 13" The end result was that he was "shipped around here and there for a while" [8(119)]. In effect, this meant staying with his "cousin, Ian, for a while at Figtree and then I stayed with one of my other cousins, Jamie, at Dapto" [8(151)]. The move to place Allan in the statutory care of the government Minister for Community Service, while reframed by Allan as "just getting to know the family a bit more really" [8(151)], added to the fragmentation of relationships within his already traumatised family.

By age 15, he was in a juvenile detention centre and upon his release went to live in a refuge. A return to his family and their geographic area was not possible after his release and so

when he “got released from Mt Penang [detention centre]”, Caretakers Cottage [youth refuge] was “where the minibus dropped me off” [8(175)]. From there, Allan “moved around the refuge[s] around the city, like Caretakers, St Vinnies for Youth, the Op” [8(175)].

The loss of his mother, combined with the loss of country, friends, community support and structure were personified in the fragmentation of family. It was the multiple disconnections that raised the question of *belonging*. As a result of his growing separation from key people and places, and a period in detention, he landed in the inner city and began to seek out other people with whom he could make connection:

After a week or two of being in Sydney I started to talk to a few people and I walked into the main street of Kings Cross the first time ever with someone I was living with at Caretakers. Yeah, I got to know them a bit. We sat down, had lunch, had coffee and stuff... and I met up with a certain person ... that I had a relationship with for four years. And she was a working girl herself and like I didn't know nothing about the working situation or anything for not being from here. Yeah. I was sitting there waiting with her one night and next thing I know she has walked over and said here's \$150 from the bloke in that car 'cause he reckons you're cute.

Allan 8(199, 203)

The aim was to find people and to be connected. However, because of the environment, precursor relationships take on a different hue. Unbounded and unrestricted exploration within this environment led Allan very quickly to the edge of SMSW, an unimagined and unknown psychosocial terrain. Damien (23) also experienced the loss of family at 13 after a new partner entered his mother's life. He was “kicked out of home and [was] sort of hanging around with, you know, people on the streets”. He grew up west of Sydney but the inner city “seemed to be the place to be, kind of thing” [4(22-23)]. The loss of connection to significant people, who tend to restrict and bound adolescent exploration, also left Damien open to an unimagined and unknown psychosocial terrain.

Where a failure in baseline relationships occurs, making new connections is a haphazard experience. Malcolm (18) became homeless, lived in a refuge in the suburbs, and then found himself connected and then further isolated. For Malcolm, moving from home to a refuge “Freaked [him] out at first. The kids were all right. The workers were all right. [He] ended up

liking it towards the end, when [he] got thrown out. So [he] didn't like it after that" [3(98-99)]. He described himself as "messed up" and that he "just didn't really have anybody, like any of my family that I could turn to", so he "thought [he would] go out and try and defend for myself" [3(107)]. When he was 11, he travelled to the inner city where survival is particularly haphazard and the risks and pitfalls are unknown for a boy of his age. Malcolm "had no idea" how he would "defend" himself on the street. He "just thought [he] would go up Kings Cross and see what [he] could do up there. That's when [he] started working" [3(108-111)]. The loss of core relationships through familial fragmentation marked the advent of a higher level of isolation, and this spelt the beginning of exposure to other people in an unbounded and unrestricted manner. Family relationships, even while containing dysfunctional elements, have restrictive and protective qualities. Once these are lost, new connections fill the void with both positive and negative outcomes.

Germaine (22) identified that an early awareness of his own sexual identity became the point of conflict between him and his family. This led to a running towards, and identification with, the inner city area at age 13:

I heard about Oxford Street, *The Wall*, that protects homosexuality and I thought, yeah, that would be the place for me. There was action all the time, there was leeringness [sic], there was loudness, there was everything out there. Everything that a queen could possibly want but yeah, it all comes down to, it hasn't been pretty because I haven't made it to be pretty.

**Germaine 25(71)**

It was an exciting experience. The desire for "protection" and the fact that "everything was out there" made the inner city an alluring object. However, Germaine also made the point that it "hasn't been pretty", and while I assume this was a reference to intransigent homelessness, substance use and HIV, the primary reference point remains his experience with his family:

Well, I look back on it now, David, where it is that I would probably have never left Port Macquarie from my family if my family would have just listened to me, you know, and didn't create those problems between my stepfather and I. I think the family would have worked out. But it's the same with my father in Sydney, in Camden. I can't go and see him now because of his wife, you know, Jeanette. Jeanette and I don't get on because of my sexuality as well, you know, and yeah. I find that a bit hard in a way.

**Germaine 25(75)**

The denial of acceptance was a powerful mediator of fragmentation for Germaine. There was regret and sadness in his retelling of this aspect of his life and the cry—"I would probably never have left"—is a palpable reminder for him of what he wanted and what he has lost. And the result "hasn't been pretty".

Mark (23) "got out" of home when he was 16 because "[He] was abused when [he] was younger" [Mark 11(43)]. The abuse began when "[He] was about five. It was mental, physical and sexual abuse and it went on for about 10 years and then it just got the better of [him] and that's where [he] believed that if [he] didn't leave, [he] would have ended up getting killed or something like that. It's pretty hard really" [Mark 11(55)]. He came to the inner city area of Sydney because "[he] was living in a refuge in Wollongong. [He] just always used to travel, come to Sydney each time. ... [He] just loved Sydney and [he] just ended up here full-time" [Mark 11(35)]. With little or no clarity about the reasons for being there and the need for money being a primary driving force, "[He] went to Kings Cross fountain and didn't know nothing about working or anything back then. But [he] wanted to make money so [he] just sat around there and [he] got propositioned for jobs, and that, and [he] ended up doing it" [Mark 11(131)]. Although it appears that his movement to the inner city was a fleeing from negative experience, it was also a purposeful and focussed journey. He travelled to the red light district of Sydney because "[He'd] heard about it. [He] was curious because back then I was in denial of myself. I was ashamed to admit that I was gay" [11(135)]. Escaping actual harm and a potential disaster was a clear motivator. Beginning to explore sexual identity was also a motivating factor away from his family relationships. However, while his relationship with family and home was disturbing and a cause to escape and run, there was another more nebulous relationship developing with a geographical place where "curiosity" could be vented and explored.

Previous research has noted that many of those engaged in male sex work have experienced child sexual abuse (Abramovich, 2005; Barrett & Beckett, 1996; Parsons et al., 2005; Pedersen & Hegna, 2003; Rotheram-Borus et al., 1996). These encounters, into which abuse

events are embedded, are significant precursor relationships to the later experience of male sex work. Jack (26) lived with his sister and parents. They rented out a room in their home to a young police officer:

He moved into the family house. Kicked my sister out of her bedroom, he took her bedroom, put her in the hallway and he would like put on a roster like what nights he would come in, what nights he would want to play, you know, and stuff.

Jack 26(82)

Jack was 15 at the time of being “put on a roster” for sexual favours. The experience of abuse at home was of profound significance:

I mean, I find it hard to believe that my parents weren't aware of what was going on because my sister was sleeping in the hallway. Their bedroom was like you know only two doors up from mine and he was in and out of bedrooms all night sort of thing.

Jack 26(94)

His incredulity took on deeper meaning because the loss of security was intimately connected to his home and his parents. Jack “was taught to put up brick walls ... when [he] was first abused, when [he] told her [a friend] about it. She said, ‘you have just got to put brick walls up and block it out’ and that’s what [he] did” [26(114)]. While this was a developed strategy for dealing with distress, he also indicated that he had little control over raising and lowering the “brick walls”. Even some 11 years later, and with emotion in his voice, “It’s not like [long pause] I can’t really deal with the issue at the moment [long pause] so like I can’t remember it” [26(122)]. The experience of violation within the home and while under the care of parents has a profound and lasting impact. It is viewed as causal in the development of silence and blocking as a way to manage thought and emotion about the experiences of childhood. It negatively influenced the ability to explore, discover, and relate to self and those who would normally be trusted. While the need and desire for understanding was equally profound, the ability to explore the ground of discovery was impaired by the past:

I feel maybe part of me is buried with it [experiences of the past]. Part of who I am and my childhood and a lot of explanations as to why I am the way I am come from that time. So I need to find all that stuff out to learn about myself, learn my vulnerabilities and my weaknesses and strengths and that sort of stuff. I need to do all of that.

Jack 26(134)

For Jack, some of the critical stuff of life was lost or at least “buried” with the past, particularly his “childhood innocence as far as sexuality and sex goes. I mean that’s still; it’s a very uncomfortable issue with me even after having done sex work. It’s still a very uncomfortable issue to talk about even with a boyfriend or another half” [26(142)].

Relational abuse also can be located within the family, as with Drake (23) who, at 12, was sexually abused by his step-father. As he mentioned in retrospect, “the sexual abuse that [he] suffered from him [step-father] had a great deal to do with my alienation from my family. He was the reason [Drake] alienated [him]self from [his] family” [6(260)]. For Drake, homelessness was an eventual outcome of his experience of alienation within the family. A similar picture is evident with Aydin (28) who became estranged from his family at 14 after arguments and persistent violence:

It was basically because as far as my father was concerned I was disrespecting him. I think I’ve told you this but what actually happened was he was washing the dog. We were washing the dog or something and he decided to use laundry powder because we didn’t have, like, any dog shampoo left and I said you can’t use it, because it’s just too caustic. He was insistent on it ... and I was saying no, no ... My grandmother was there and then he was just quite physically abusive. So he would be kicking me and hitting me in front of her and just generally and for once I decided to hit him back. I don’t know why, I don’t know what came over me. I normally would never have done that but I decided to give him, I punched him back and then he went berserk. He started attacking like berserk and then he said “that’s it, you’re out, go live on the street.”

**Aydin 19(167)**

A generalised alienation within his family and a final aggressive event precipitated his withdrawal from home. It was the way of relating and the absence of an affective connection that emerged as the final point of alienation and then withdrawal:

Yeah, and you know because there wasn’t anyone to sort of monitor and so I just decided, yeah, that’s it, that’s fine, I’ll go. I don’t need you. So I packed up and then my mum came home and she was crying and she was saying, “oh, what if I ask him if you can stay”, and it was sort of like, I’m not going to beg him. Like, I don’t know, I was just too proud because I knew I wasn’t wrong. So that’s what upset me; I wasn’t wrong. So I wasn’t going to admit it. So I left.

**Aydin 19(171)**

Aydin began to cry at this point in the interview. Jack, Drake and Aydin are representative of a common experience among the participants. Relationships that occur in and around the family setting are primary precursor relationships. Whether the relationship was with

an immediate family member or simply with someone within the family environment, these connections (and events) were instructive, formative and directive of understanding, emotion and future direction.

Peter (32) began SMSW at 14 and this developed against a backdrop of violence within and outside the family setting. His mother's various partners were "very violent, alcoholic violent", and this meant that they were "violent to [the] kids physically, very physically violent" [20(95)]. The milieu was formative:

I suppose when you grow up into it you get used to it but when it first went on it's sort of hard to get used to because you don't know what you're doing is right or if you're going to cop a hiding for it or sent to your room without dinner or something like that: you don't know. So you're very aware of if you are going to do something wrong, you are always aware of things around you so you don't get into trouble so you don't get a hiding. I was always very aware of things around me, very alert. Try not to do something wrong or say something wrong or be home late from school.

**Peter 20(99)**

These early experiences, with both his immediate and extended family, were associated with the development of anxiety and hypervigilance, with Peter trying to avoid any situation that placed him at risk of emotional or physical distress. After leaving his immediate family at eight years of age, he was "adopted" by his uncle and aunt, one of whom was an alcoholic. The violence he previously experienced recurred:

It was good at first but then I got in trouble a little bit and he used to punish me, like hit me with wood or buckle end of the belt, stand me near the side of the tele[vision] and I used to stand there for hours and if I'd sway, you know sometimes when you are standing there for a while in one position you sway a bit, he used to come up with a cigarette and burn my fingers.

**Peter 20(183)**

Long after the violence had ended, Peter attempted to understand both his family's behaviour and his own experience within that context:

So he was a very: maybe something happened to him when he was young, maybe a lot of violence or maybe he was treated the same way or similar. So now that he's older and there is a little kid in the house, he is able to re-enact that. Because I think some people re-enact things like that in their lives and that's one thing I don't want to do.

**Peter 20(183)**

Re-enactments of violence, not dissimilar to that which he experienced as a child, became central to his way of being. There was no talk of relationships or connections of import, except in the

negative, and these were viewed as highly influential. The instability and violence within these critical precursor relationships brought about further running; and a movement to Kings Cross, crime and then prostitution at 14:

By hanging around a lot of the kids that were up there, they were all on drugs and I used to break into cars or steal cars or rob people for money and stuff like that and I got wound up into that sort of environment and I started doing that for a while. But then I stopped doing it because I didn't want to get into trouble. Like I mean it got a bit much, I kept getting into trouble all the time so I thought there has got to be an easier way of doing it. So some of the blokes were selling themselves and a few times it was scary but, I don't know, it's one of the things you had to do to survive, I suppose.

**Peter 20(131)**

Even though the precursor relationships could not be viewed as directly causal of his involvement in sex work, they were nonetheless influential in the ongoing experience of violence and alcohol. These events created a context where SMSW was more likely to occur. The precursor events and relationships created an experiential, and related cognitive, pathway that led to decision making based on perceptions of available options:

I don't know if it was a conscious decision. I think it was a lot of things like money, always having to go out and belt people all the time. There had to be an easier way. I think there was a time when I first got into it, I think I was drunk and I didn't really understand it, but it was an easy way of making money because I was young and a lot of people like young kids. So I used that as my advantage.

**Peter 20(135)**

This crafting of the future for Peter, founded as it was on the back of precursor relational experiences, was imbued with negative messages that placed limits on the development of a perspective on the future. He experienced the horror of a violent and alcoholic environment. This was evident in his treatment of himself and of others.

Some young males engaged in SMSW had prior experiences of institutionalisation. Jeffrey (26) was placed in various institutions for wards of the state on the basis that he was in need of care. Early sexualisation was a part of his experience, both inside and outside the institutional setting:

When I was older, it was noted in my wardship file that there were signals that I'd been pretty close to some of the male staff. But as usual, it goes on with government authority, they cover it

up. They cover each others' arse. So, whether anyone had any inkling what was going on, it was covered up or hushed up pretty well.

**Jeffrey 7(279)**

For Jeffrey, the connection between early sexualisation and later MSW was a conduit to sex work. He was able to acknowledge that, had abuse not occurred, then “[he] probably would have ended up doing something else to make the money. [He] had a brief lull between 16 and 17 of working where [he] became a drug courier to support [his] drug habit” [7(283)]. By the time he was 17, working, substance use and other criminal activity were staunch elements of his daily existence. However, this particular approach to life had a link not just to the perpetrators of the early sexualisation but also to the other adults who engaged with him at the time:

Jeffrey: The psychologist I'd seen; I wasn't really happy talking about what happened at home. I mean I talked about it often enough and nothing eventuated out of it, so, what's the use of keep on talking about it. No one does anything. There's just no use in doing anything, because of my temper and my aggro [aggression]. It would've been within the first 6 months of me going to the institution that I had been sexually approached by one of the staff there.

DL: And how old were you when you went there?

Jeffrey: I was seven when that happened. I was, because my dad did it to me, I didn't really feel there was anything wrong with it, but after it, the day after, I was worse than ever in the institution. In the 6 months I'd been there, I'd settled down quite well, but the day after that, I was back to my normal self, like I was when I was a kid. They made me see a psychiatrist in one of Melbourne's hospitals. The doctor, he said I was paranoid schizophrenic bordering on psychosis or I had ADD intermingled with schizophrenia. That sort of put me on a roller coaster of drugs, right up until I was nine.

**Jeffrey 7(215-219)**

Within his home and within the institution, Jeffrey was surrounded by people who either took advantage of him or failed to notice, comprehend or act on his experience of being repeatedly abused. He was clinical about relationships. They were viewed as subservient to the procurement and use of drugs. Further, the need to perform sexual favours in order to gain access to drugs appeared of secondary significance. His need for drugs dominated his thinking and actions.

The retelling of his story shed light on a complex scenario. Evident in the retelling was a pervasive disinterest in, and even an abhorrence of, relationships. This was a consequence of environmental failure. His family and other relationships within the broader social fabric to which he had been exposed imbued within him certain ideas about himself, his body and relationships.

Jeffrey understood the power of those negative experiences and even some 19 years after the events described, he retained a poignant understanding of their significance in his development. For him, there was a “combination of factors” that created a negative and debilitating experience of relating:

The fact that they didn't investigate what my dad did to me or my older sister. Constant peer pressure, like getting picked on by my peers wasn't the best thing for me. A bit of peer support at that age would have gone a long way but, you know, I was considered an outsider, a weirdo, a nerd and all sorts of bloody things. More times than not in the institution, I spent time by myself or with just one or two other people.

Jeffrey 7(239)

The most immediate and obvious element of his precursor relationships was that when he was relating, it was abusive. At times, when there was no abuse, there were no relationships and there was nothing but isolation.

Notwithstanding his experience of abuse and isolation, there was an awareness of what was important in the development of positive relationships. When this occurred with one of the female carers associated with one of the institutions in which he lived, it was memorable and highly influential:

Probably it's the only person who ever gave a shit about me. You know, there was a few times where she's taken time off; just me and her, you know, like we've disappeared from the institution for a couple of days. Stayed at her place for a weekend. Gotta admit that was one of the best weekends I had. She got me hooked on Lego bricks. She realised that I was good with my hands. I didn't realise any of that until I was a teenager. But when she brought around the Lego set and it sort of transformed me because I switched off from everyone giving me shit, annoying me you know, and I'd go and sit in my room and play with these bloody Lego bricks. She just kept on buying more and more and more and more, and I would have been about 17 when I last saw her. So, she'd be an old lady by now. I'd like to get in contact with her again, but, every time I've tried, I haven't been able to.

Jeffrey (7/242-243; 247)

Even against a background of abuse, neglect and violence, Jeffrey was able to gain from this solitary experience of positive relating. He retained the memory of how the relationship worked and gained ideas about how to deal with the isolation he experienced in those moments when people gave him “shit”.

Dennis (21) lived with his mother until he was 19, and after an absence of some two years, returned to live with her while working *The Wall* and in the bars. He began MSW at 16. Living with family is not necessarily a factor that leads to positive life experiences but it can be the case when other factors are present:

Dennis: I think I get lots of stuff from her like that. Like as long as I can remember she has always had two jobs and stuff like that and she has always like, filled me on sort of if we are ever going to be in trouble or sort of if we are doing well and stuff like that. Like, even when I was really young, I can always remember sort of being part of whatever was going on with her.

DL: So there is a strong connection there?

Dennis: Yeah, for sure. Like we're really good friends as well. Like we go out together and stuff. Just the other day we went to the casino together. Yesterday I went with her to get a makeover at DJs and stuff like that. You know like we get dressed up heaps nice and go places together and that.

**Dennis 2(813-818)**

Conversation, shared interests and involvements, time, and a sense of closeness are imperative in relationships if they are to be protective of the person in the face of adversity. Where this occurs, this formative environment can lead to a personal capacity for self- and other-protection. A capacity for adaptation, and hence, positive social and relational involvements, can also be a consequence of such positive experiences.

For Jules (23), whose home experience was inclusive and engaging, his first overture into the sex work arena was at 16. However, prior to that point, he was already discussing it at "14 or 15 years of age" with "a mate of mine from high school":

He's one of the oldest friends I've got and I said, "I had this idea, man, doing the gay boys and you'd only be sucking on latex, wouldn't you, big deal". He sort of went, "oh yeah".

**Jules 18b(31)**

He was living at home and engaged in study. His first sex work experience was organised, framed, and experienced as a positive event. More significantly, it was incorporated into the mainstream precursor relationships in his life through a level of openness in conversation that itself was adaptive:

Then after that I went home and my sister, Josie, the oldest one, she said to me, "so where have you been?" I went, "yeah, I kind of wanted to talk to you about that actually"... So I told my sister and she was really stunned and she just said to me, I think you should think about this, and

I said, yeah, yeah, right. So just for about six months I just sort, not at the forefront of my mind, just sort of the backburner, how do I feel about this, am I emotionally scarred? Am I?

DL: What were the answers?

Jules: No, I was looking and looking and I just couldn't see anything at all. I was just going, no, I've just some more money.

Jules 18b(71, 86-91)

Jules was able to bring a radical, outlying human experience back into the mainstream of his life. He explored the potential experience, first with his “mate” from high school, and then with an older sibling. His “mate” remained his “mate” some 10 years later. His sister was able to tolerate and manage the information her younger 16 year old brother gave her, without rejection and, significantly, with a capacity to provide some guidance rather than scorn. Finally, his “mum” knew about his sex work, as did, “the oldest three sisters” [Jules 18a(163)]. This was what made the difference for Jules. Experiences, no matter how radical, are more manageable for the child and adolescent where adults are able to capture and accept the experience of the child or adolescent and guide them—in a non-abusive and non-violent manner—towards the development of understanding and adaptive responses.

*Precursor relationships to SMSW* are significant. They are the social and personal environment where experience (both positive and negative) is captured and where adaptation occurs, or does not. Early and core relational experiences matter. Where they are helpful, they can positively influence the level of exposure to adversity, the manner in which the person copes with (and adapts to) adversity and the degree to which the person engages in aimless meandering through potentially dangerous experiences. Other significant relationships can have a similar effect. Marginalised young males who have access to geographic areas where SMSW occurs, come across and enter into relationships that are extremely influential. These relationships mediate access to many and varied events while the young male begins *engaging the scene* of SMSW.

## Engaging the scene: A relational perspective

Rarely do young males simply walk up Oxford Street in Darlinghurst, head to *The Wall* and begin sex work. As with most relational experiences, there are introductions to be made and there are people who help, or even facilitate contacts, when the person begins *engaging the scene* of SMSW. To understand the origin of any involvement in SMSW, it is important to comprehend the introductions to the world of SMSW. These introductions are mediated by, and embedded in, relationships. Peers serve as the most common route to SMSW. Young people who are homeless operate within a larger social environment that connects them with health and other support services. It also locates them with other young people who are likewise in need of assistance. This exposes them to a diverse world where access to various personal and social experiences—substance use, sex work, counselling and therapy, health services, mainstream work opportunities and myriad relationships—are readily available and command the attention of the young male.

Richard (21) was introduced to a mix of people and events by an older male already engaged in SMSW. As he indicated, it brought about things he may have wanted and needed, but it also introduced him, perhaps unknowingly, to events that were potentially or actually hazardous. The older male “showed [him] a few of the [welfare] places ... where [he] had [his] first sort of contact outside [statutory] welfare, where [he] found out there’s other agencies and met other people what were in [his] situation. So, yeah, it did help” [1(60)]. Positive aid given by a peer provided access to food, shelter, counsel and connections to other forms of support. Other introductions also were made:

He showed me where *The Wall* was, which I didn’t have a clue what it was. I ran out of money. I ended up there, ended up into the drugs from that side. I couldn’t say no to people when they wanted, you know, when they tried to pick me up. A whole heap of stuff. I learnt to smoke pot, all that, learned speed then, yeah, so there was a lot of negative, the party life I learnt through him.

**Richard (1/61-64)**

At 14, Richard was befriended. From this introduction, he became immersed in, and identified with, a street-based male sex work culture. This became a world where multiple and progressive

introductions continued to be made. He “met a few of the other boys [who] introduced themselves to [him] and started chatting and all that and, you know, one of the boys got the job for [him] and that’s how [he] met him [the first client]” [1(96)]. These were associations that guarded against isolation and loneliness. However, the focus of the contact with peers and others was the SMSW experience with the multiplicity of elements that made up that complex experience:

I was so off my face. It was freaky at first, but I met a lot of nice people there, what actually worked and they, you know, sort of supported me and helped me. It was like a little community, in a community, you know, if you understand.

**Richard (1/71-76)**

Richard prized the inclusiveness he experienced within the SMSW subculture but appeared unaware of, or blasé towards, any negative consequences.

Engaging the scene of SMSW is not simply about making contact with knowing individuals. It is also about access to the individuals, their world and behaviour patterns. Jack’s (26) engagement with SMSW at 17 was set within the context of an important relationship:

I was living in a youth hostel and my boyfriend at the time then gave me a quarter of an ounce of speed which he then had to work for and I found out he was doing sex work so it was like it was the whole ... I don’t know, it was exciting because of the image put across by movies such as *Pretty Woman* and those sort of movies that make prostitution glamorous and like that image was in my head from as a child watching those movies and then having a boyfriend who was in the sex industry made it even more enticing. Just to go there. It was like, I don’t know, it was something that really cool people did, you know, the same thing with drugs and smoking.

**Jack 26(350)**

It was an important relationship, and an introduction to a long-imagined life style. However, it was also an introduction to substance use and, at the same time, the necessary means to sustain that use. It was a powerful relational combination of fantasy, love, nurture, drugs and SMSW.

Damien was 13 when he became homeless. His vulnerability was acute and his capacity for rational thinking, assessment, and prudent judgement was quite limited. At a loose end, he began “hanging around with a few blokes who’d, you know, been around for a little while. They were getting into small crimes, you know, break and enters and stuff” [4(43)]. This was primarily

about being “accepted into the crowd, sort of thing, so you just go along and if they’re doing a break and enter or stealing a car or something you just sort of get in on it. Yeah, just being part of the crowd” [4(51)]. He “did the petty crime thing for maybe 3 or 6 months” [4(59)]. Access to this group meant access to other events, practices and people:

Yeah, it was kind of other activities. What happened was I met a guy and didn’t realise that he was kind of gay. I wasn’t really, you know, well educated or whatever, you know, sensitive to that kind of thing and, you know, he met me and we went back to his house. He was in his late twenties or something and he knew a couple of the other guys I was with, you know, we smoked heaps of cones and had a couple of lines and I didn’t even know what it was. I found out later it was heroin. I ended up staying with him for a couple of months and, you know, he pretty much looked after me. He was selling heroin so he had plenty of money and whatever I wanted was there. But there was also, you know, the kind of, sexual side of it which, you know, really sort of spun me a bit.

**Damien 4(71)**

The abandonment of Damien in childhood created a situation where there was an unregulated and premature exposure to a myriad of psychosocial experiences — homelessness, opportunistic petty crime, substance use, and sexual abuse. This unregulated exposure was beyond what is normally regarded as developmentally possible for a 13 year old and certainly beyond his comprehension. The capacity to assess for danger, regulate exposure to harm, and protect himself from people and events, was extremely limited:

At first, you know, I was so out of it and I think I was asleep or something and I woke up and thought, “What’s going on here kind of thing?” and just kind of went back to sleep I was that out of it. He was kind of really sneaky about it, you know, like trying to do it when I was out of it and then gradually it started, you know, became more obvious and he was more up-front about it and, you know, I was, I didn’t really want it.

**Damien 4(75)**

Despite his clearly articulated desire not to be sexually involved with his chosen carer, he was now stuck. Homeless, keen on drugs and other financial benefits, the desire not to be enmeshed with a sexually abusive adult was soon replaced by another frame of reference:

But, you know, I was kind of stuck because I became a bit dependent on him, you know, being young and having someone there, it was sort of like a dad almost, you know, looking after me and getting me anything I wanted. Yeah, so that was, you know, it was a bit of a trap.

**Damien 4(75)**

His experience was shifting and so was his understanding. He needed to survive and this older man had much of what Damien needed—stability of housing, money, other gifts—and with that

realisation came the developing understanding that sex for the purpose of survival was what must now take place:

I mean, I guess a lot of the time I was, you know, like I wanted to tell him to stop, you know, I wanted to scream, “Stop”, you know, “don’t touch me” sort of thing. But at the same time, I was really scared and didn’t want to move. But as well, I also felt like I owed him something. Yeah, so basically, I just sort of lay there and, you know, didn’t say or do anything. Yeah, it was pretty confusing. I guess I just didn’t have the power at the time to, you know, say, “Stop, go away” or to leave myself, you know, to stop it from happening, because I didn’t want it to happen.

**Damien 4(79)**

Damien found himself within a relationship that he needed and in some ways wanted but in which he also experienced fear, confusion, anxiety, and powerlessness. Over-riding those sensations was the need to survive. The theme of abusive sex, transiting into survival sex, was reflected in the lives of a number of the participants, including Shaun (23):

At first it was all good, we were just sort of friends, until about two weeks later and then, yeah. It got sexual . . . just on the sly. Never really did anything. Like started a week and then after that, it was everything.

**Shaun 16(195, 199)**

It began with the older male searching out a vulnerable younger male. A grooming process ensued, the aim of which was to enculturate the younger male into a relationship where sexual favours were provided in return for support, money and security:

I was awake but you have no money, you’ve sort of got to pay rent somehow I guess, I don’t know. Fear of getting kicked out type thing, nowhere to stay.

**Shaun 16(215)**

There was no sense that Shaun could control his destiny with this older male or the direction he may wish to take in his world. He was stuck and fearful.

While this phenomenon sounds like a commercial transaction, and may therefore be viewed as sex work, the distinction between sex work and survival sex is contained in the thinking and intention—the internal dialogues—of the young male.

I guess the way that I thought about the guy, you know, and the way he kind of conned me into thinking about him. He was like a big brother or a father kind of thing and, yeah, it’s hard to describe it, you know. Those sort of things shouldn’t happen, you know.

**Damien 4(143)**

Both Shaun and Damien sought a relationship for the purpose of care and nurture. Unaware of the grooming process that had occurred—which involved the supply of necessities and the constant offer of illicit substances—they were stunned by the sexual events. The older person said “it was never gonna happen. He always said that you are not here for sex and rah, rah, rah and just did it anyway” [Shaun 16(319)].

The sexual gratification of the person (who is seen as a surrogate for other significant primary relationships) is an activity defined by the participant as a necessity. It was a desired relationship but an unwilling behaviour. The sexual events were engaged in for the sake of survival. Participants who experienced such encounters had no thoughts of sex work when they happened into these self-defined surrogate parental relationships. However, the connection to MSW is clear and the transition to *The Wall* was rapid. As Shaun indicated about his understanding of the movement from survival sex to sex work, “They got me into it. I wouldn’t have even known about it if I hadn’t gone there: that way, that path” [16(455)].

Early childhood experiences—embedded in relationships and environments—matter in the psychosocial development of the person. Within that understanding, the experience of early sexualisation, which is framed as abuse, clearly influences the way psychosocial development proceeds, relationships are formed, and engagement with the contextual environment is experienced. What is perhaps more significant to the current study is how these early relational experiences and environments mediate access to relational experiences and environments approximating SMSW. These introductory relationships carry significant influence over the person’s progression from *not knowing* to *knowing* in terms of sex work. Negative precursor relationships predispose and introduce the person to thinking and experiences that fragment personal development and relationships. They create a relational void that cries out to be filled. However, it is the relationships and environments more proximate to SMSW that actually capitalise on the early neglectful environment. They effectively mediate access to a range of new, unregulated, accidental encounters that can be negative and positive.

## Relating within the SMSW scene

For the person who comes to SMSW with a background of homelessness, his first sex work experience is invariably set against the broader contextual background. For some, this context is negative, while for others it is positive. Where the prior experiential backdrop is negative, it is constituted by youthfulness, social isolation, poverty, naivety, and limited knowledge of prostitution. Even where the background features are more positive, or at least less fragmenting, youthfulness ensures that naivety and a lack of knowledge dominate early SMSW events. Whatever the background elements to the individual narrative, *relating within the SMSW scene* is about relating to a scene and people: other workers, authority, health and welfare, and clients.

Malcolm (18) was 12 when he arrived at Kings Cross looking to “defend” himself [3(107)]. He ran from home and an institution to the *red light* district of the city, about which he “had no idea”. Right from the beginning, relating to the scene was about survival, activity and the people who could assist in that endeavour. Malcolm was with another runaway boy from an institution, and once in Kings Cross his young friend “introduced [him] to a mug”. As the day progressed, he and his young friend “split up” and later in the day, Malcolm “was sitting in the main street and the mug come up to [him] and asked [him] to go back to his place, so [he] did” [3(115)]. He was 12. Notwithstanding the fact that his friend made the initial introduction to the ‘mug’, while he was with his friend, nothing occurred. Only when he was alone were approaches made by the older male and a new episode in his life was initiated.

A number of features dominated this first street-based experience: youth, vulnerability, confusion, all of which were driven by the primary desire to survive. Malcolm’s wishes were clear. All he wanted was “somewhere to stay”. He “was young ... didn’t really think like [he does] now. If someone said that to [him] now [he] would sort of know what they were after, but back then [he] didn’t know” [3(143)]. The intention was survival, not prostitution or sex work and Malcolm

“didn’t really know what to think”. He had no idea that “he’d like, hurt [him] or anything” [3(139)].

At the time of this encounter, and notwithstanding his introduction to Kings Cross by his runaway friend, Malcolm had some knowledge, and a degree of understanding, implied by his presence in Kings Cross. However, neither the knowledge nor his understandings were comprehensive or even accessible, let alone of any use at the time of this first street-based encounter. Driving Malcolm’s thinking was the need and desire for survival. With that firmly in the front of his thinking, there was also no capacity to assess the encounter for danger. Malcolm was reluctant to unpack the details of this event, which dominated his life for some time to come. Suffice to say that he was “scared [of the mug] more than anything; didn’t know what to do” [3(175)]. Malcolm “was like so small and just, [he] don’t know. He [the mug] used to lock [him] in the apartment when he went out during the day and there was no way of [Malcolm] getting out. That really scared” him [3(179)]. Some six years later, at the time of this interview, he was unable to recount what occurred to him in detail because he was recently involved in giving evidence against the “mug” in a criminal trial over his predation and abuse of young males. At the conclusion of the legal matter, Malcolm’s reflection was that he “just went through a lot with that court case, going through everything and they let him go” [3(167)]. The research interview was affected by the failure of the legal system to grapple with the encounter between the 12 year old boy and the predatory older man.

This encounter, while a knowing experience for the “mug”, was a chaotic, accidental, dangerous and yet survival-inspired encounter. He was clear about what he wanted but ignorant of the full meaning of the encounter. It was not sex work, or even survival sex. It was not a negotiated encounter. Being physically and emotionally trapped—unable to secure his own release—dominated his retrospective analysis. For Malcolm, at 12, this first event marked the beginning of being “passed” around from one “mug” to another. He was with the first person

for “about 2 months. And then he became a real asshole, so [he] left when [he] got the chance to” [3(199)]:

I actually moved out down to, it was about two streets down because Max had a friend who had another boy who was in a flat, a two-bedroom flat. And I ended up moving into the flat and just went and seen Max a couple of times a week and he paid my rent and all that. Then we just had an argument and I left. I had enough of him hitting me all the time.

**Malcolm 3(203)**

Malcolm was initiated and enculturated into a world in which he developed dependence. What was initially a search for assistance and support from “Max” the “mug” was now understood to be survival sex. Malcolm saw Max “a couple of times a week and he paid [Malcolm’s] rent”.

Raymond (26) was introduced to the street sex work scene by other “street kids”. Like Malcolm, this did not guarantee a safe passage into, or through, the SMSW experience. Other boys told him that “You get paid for sexual work and I didn’t believe them at first and then I checked it out for myself and went into the business and started selling myself then” [15(91)]. At 16, Raymond was considerably older than Malcolm was at the time of his first encounter in the red light area of Sydney. As such, his description of the initiation process contains more understanding and personal agency. That said, thoughtfulness and investigation do not necessarily prevent harm from arising within SMSW encounters.

Raymond “was 16 and [he] was ... manipulated by a bloke that was in his 40s and he used to buy [him] things and that. He introduced [him] to heroin and at the time [he] didn’t know what it was” [15(107)]. He “put it in [Raymond’s] drink” [15(111)]. A crucial element of most initiations into the SMSW scene is the grooming and deception process carried out by clients on the young males with the aim of ingratiation. While the young male may know some things about the world, and this world in particular—as Raymond did—he still lacks the knowledge required to successfully negotiate this complex world. While Raymond knew of *The Wall*, he “didn’t know” about heroin “until [he] just had it”, and so “it didn’t worry me at the time because I didn’t know very much about it”. While Raymond “wasn’t that shocked”, he “was still surprised” that he didn’t know about such a crucial element of the SMSW scene. It only began to worry him

when his “body sort of got a need for that” [15(111)]. By then, he was beyond the initiation process. He had been enculturated into the SMSW scene with all that it entails. This relationship—the vehicle for Raymond’s engaging of the scene—came quickly to an end:

I woke up one morning wanting heroin and he just wouldn’t give it to me. Said I was on my own. He sort of left me with a habit and I had to go on from there. Start working.

**Raymond 15(111)**

For Raymond, this is the same story as “with most other workers” [15(115)]. While he had general knowledge of the scene at that point, he did not understand the connection between SMSW and substance use. His assessment of the SMSW scene was negative and originated from this first and crucial encounter, which was his vehicle for engaging with the SMSW scene.

By the time of the interview, Raymond understood the fullness of the SMSW scene, especially, the precursor relationships that predispose a young male to SMSW. These were the relationships within the scene that were, for him, the harbingers of negative life experiences:

I met other young boys sort of similar circumstances to me, like some had parents, some didn’t. They went and worked *The Wall* because they were hurt with their past life, the way they were brought up or abused and they were mistreated. A client mistreated them or something and they had nothing. You know, because of all the abuse they have copped all their life they just were ready to throw it away and start doing this sex work so they’d forget about it. And often most of the cases they worked not, you know, they worked and got the money and some didn’t even use, they just worked and to meet people just so it would get their mind off their past. Some other boys and that would sort of, didn’t have a choice, because of the abuse they’ve copped and that and like I said, they got mistreated by other clients and that and went on to the drugs and that and it’s really sad and that, you know.

**Raymond 15(127)**

It was a “really sad” story that Raymond told and his conclusion was that relating with people in the SMSW scene was less about relating and more about money, greed and an abuse of power:

I believe that because for a start they wouldn’t go there if they didn’t know what the place was about, you know, and for them to go there knowing they would be a client figure to the, you know, to the boys that are working there. They play a role in like hanging around because the boys look up to them because they’ve got the money. So, you know, I get the feeling, not in general, but I seem to think that a lot of other boys might have the same opinion that, you know, they used the power to get what they want, their place in society because they have got the set up and a job and all that, they use that for what they want to get out of the boy. That’s wrong.

**Raymond 15(131)**

Jason (18) was 14 when he became homeless and in need of support and the basics of human existence. He lived in refuges around the city, and outer suburbs, and in a campervan. He eventually landed in the Kings Cross area, at a refuge, at around 15. It was “mainly the lights at night, which is, might sound pretty funny to some”. However, for Jason, “it’s the lights that drew [sic]” him back to “the nightlife” [5(136)]; yet, he “really had no involvement with the nightlife. [He] was just basically a part of the scenery” [5(180)]. His perception of the entire psychosocial environment is tellingly negative: “you could take a picture of one of the places there and I was there ... another worthless person to the bitter scenery” [5(184)].

Jason was in the red light district, but on the periphery of the scene. The only “habits” he had were “entertainment and music” [5(224)]. Substance use was less of an issue for him. However, income was scarce and the avoidance of criminal behaviours was a strong incentive to engage in SMSW:

I met this guy at Kings Cross station and he offered me, at that time, I was smoking a little bit of pot but all it did was put me to sleep, so I didn’t really smoke it. This guy offered me to come to, go back to his apartment and smoke some pot and earn a bit of extra money. So I thought OK, I need money. Went back there and I came back. I ended up going back there every now and then to get more money.

Jason 5(248)

That “usually” involved “fuckin’ him, getting fucked, getting sucked off” [5(256)] and Jason made it through the experience by controlling and focussing his thoughts: “Basically, [he] didn’t think of it at the time; focussed [his] mind on other things: girls” [5(260)]. The motivation for involvement in SMSW was clear. It was about money, survival and business.

Well, I can’t call them *mugs* because *mugs* is like a term to say you drink out of. OK, you might drink out of their pockets, so to speak, but they’re a client, they’re a clientele, yes. I provide a service; they pay me. They’re my clients.

Jason 5(344)

For Jason, the context and meaning of these sex work practices was clear and delimited. He engaged with the scene within the framework of it being a service industry and a source of income. While others may have regarded it as a criminal activity, his position is equally clear: “it’s not a crime to go out, sell yourself, yeah. I’d rather do that. I’d rather get fucked up the arse, even

though I'm basically straight, than go out and fuckin' break into cars. And I have been tempted to do that" [5(288)]. It was beyond a matter of mere survival. It was framed as a work choice: "... they're human beings and they're helping me out after I provide the services. I'm working for my money. I'm providing a service, so legally, in my legal position, I have a job, yeah, because I provide a service and I get paid for it" [5(352)]. For Jason, there are no other elements to the relational encounter, but "if they want to give extra, like a donation or something, or if they want to shout a dinner. By all means they can shout it if I'm available" [5(597)].

Young males who engage in SMSW rarely discover a person who is willing to care for their needs and not cause harm. Further, they do not always deal with the MSW experience in a positive or self-protective manner. At 14, Peter's first SMSW experience was imbued with little capacity for self-protection. He "was drunk" and didn't "really remember much at all" [20(143)]. Alongside the drunkenness, there was another dynamic—a way of managing the experience—of which other participants also spoke. As Peter indicated, "[he] remember[ed] a few of them, yeah, but a lot of them, [he] sort of blocked out because [he] started to get dirty on [him]self". Peter's engagement with the SMSW scene produced a need to "block out" the memory of the people and the experiences because he was "letting people do stuff like that [pause] letting people take advantage of [him] because [he] needed money or because [he] was hungry or [he] needed somewhere to stay and there was always a catch to it". Peter's encounters in SMSW were about passively allowing things to happen to him within a context of great personal need. He was hungry and homeless and while there was always the offer to "stay at my place", the sexual caveat was also present. So within the context of homelessness and poverty and at 14, the over-riding relational message was that "you have to have sex with me" [20(147)].

The context and meaning of SMSW relationships and practices were clear. Older males met within this context are solely about the satisfaction of their sexual needs. In return they provide the necessities for survival. For Peter, and for his part, this involved, "head jobs, hand jobs" and "some people just wanted to hold you and stuff like that and be close to you and

maybe kiss you a few times” [20(159)]. His reactions to the encounters were equally clear: “a lot of the times [he] hated it and [he] couldn’t wait to finish. [He] just wanted the money and by then [he] was on drugs: pot and acid and gear [heroin] [20(159)]. Interestingly, his comment is not that he hated these encounters *all* of the time but “a lot of the time”. Perhaps arising out of the ambivalence, Peter, like Raymond and others, developed strategies for managing the cognitive and emotional dissonance:

I had no feelings. Like I blocked out all my feelings a lot of the time through the gear. That’s why I got onto the gear a lot because just the thought, sometimes just the thought of having sex with a bloke really turned me off.

**Peter 20(167)**

While silence, blocking and substance use were strategies developed to manage and suppress the emotional and cognitive dissonance, other significant aspects of Peter—such as his moral code—were suppressed or relegated to being of lesser importance because of the overriding need for the basics of human existence. He was clear that SMSW “just wasn’t me” but it occurred because he “needed the money or [he] was hungry. [He] needed somewhere to stay, so [he] had to do something to survive”. Although there was a suppression of his ethical code for the sake of survival, it had not disintegrated because he was still able to say that “I just didn’t feel that it was the right thing for me to do, to give my body to someone when that’s not what I wanted to do” [20(163)].

The relationships that transpire within the context of SMSW are first and foremost about survival. Compromises are made to achieve that end, with decisions constantly being refreshed and remade about how far to go within the encounter in order to achieve that desired end. The dynamic quality of the decision-making arises: (a) because there is a lack of knowledge and understanding on the part of the young male and (b) because significant power is invested in the client by both parties. This emerges primarily because the client has the resources to which the young male seeks access. As experienced by many of the young males, it is an unwanted but necessary commercial encounter, where blindness to full reality is a defining element of the

encounter. While this defines many of the SMSW encounters, for some young males, this new reality is an extension of known territory. It mirrors that which occurred in their precursor environment.

For Jeffrey, at nine years of age and living within an institutional setting, his initial *on the run* involvement in SMSW appeared as a logical continuation of well known experiences:

When I got out of Warrawong [an institution], I ended up in a section called Acora, and I got, yeah, it's the closest I got to bloody raped, by one of the night staff. By that morning, I pissed off and headed to, I knew where St Kilda was already. I went down to St Kilda [red light district in Melbourne]. I knew Fitzroy Street but I didn't actually know whereabouts in Fitzroy Street it was. I only had to walk maybe 10 minutes and I got picked up by about three or four different blokes. It spun me out, you know, so this is obviously Fitzroy Street. I'd worked it out pretty quickly. Within the first two or three nights, I'd already worked out where the boys were, where we could go and hide, do our bits, and the money was quite good. The younger you are, the more you perform, the more money you got.

Jeffrey 7(259)

It was about performing and that was about "how much they enjoyed what you gave them". It mostly involved "blowjobs, you know, head jobs" [7(267)]. Jeffrey's descriptions of SMSW were matter-of-fact and free of emotional embellishment. They were a simple retelling of raw experience. And yet when the conversation turned to more recent thoughts about sex work and whether he would return to that way of living, he was more reflective about his own childhood. Specifically, he was reflective about the impact that abandonment had had on him and of his feeling about the relationships that were established while relating within the SMSW scene:

Kids shouldn't be subjected to that sort of thing but unfortunately, sometimes they are ... I still have troubles dealing with, you know, that I used to work. I was a drug-addicted child, you know. As a state ward, that's a really bad pity you know; it's the way a child shouldn't grow up. It's just; it's cruel for a child. They lose their childhood. When you're a child, that's it, you're meant to be a child. You're meant to be honest. To be working, drug-affected, just living on the streets, you know; it's not a way for a child to be.

Jeffrey 7(163, 167)

For some of the participants, it was difficult to unravel their childhood experiences from those more proximate to SMSW. It all seemed to be a continuous flow of "cruel" events that marked the loss and destruction of childhood and adult life:

Friends have come in and out of my life since I was a kid you know and it continues on now. There's not that many people that I know from when I was a teenager and importantly, from when I was a child. That in itself was a bit of a sorry state. It makes me very wary of people. I

don't trust people until I get to know them properly or I won't let anyone come into, I even know that I can go down to *The Wall* tonight and there'd be five or six blokes down there that I've known since I was a teen but I'd never let any of them come back to my place; no way in the world. Peers have never supported me and never trusted me. I always had to go and get my drugs or go and get whatever I want off older people.

Jeffrey 7(488)

Rather than clarify the specifics about what aspects of life are better than others, it is simply all contaminated by the past—both childhood and adolescence—and this flows logically into his present understanding of life and relationships. It is a negative picture of past, present and future that arises out of childhood abandonment and abuse, adolescent running and sex work, substance abuse over a lengthy period and social isolation. Sex work encounters are one type among many that appear inadequate to his needs.

Not all relational encounters in the SMSW scene are connected with clients of sex work, and not all negative encounters are related to those clients. In a *dog eat dog* environment such as *The Wall*, young people who do sex work also may influence, and sometimes even direct, the course of another young person's life at *The Wall*. Peter has a clear perception of the worst experience he had in sex work. Rather than being an event that involved his own body, it was that "a lot of the times" he "used to go and pick up boys for this guy and he [the client] used to drug them and take advantage of them". As he reflected during the interview, "I think that was the worst thing that I did" [20(480)]. With precursor relationships that involved violence and the manipulation of thought and feeling, the continuation of that way of being was only encouraged through involvement at *The Wall*, a situation about which Peter feels considerable sadness and regret: "[he] knew about that and [he] did nothing" [20(492)]. Amidst the regret there is resignation because, as he said, "I suppose, you know, it's a part of life" [20(492)].

While Jeffrey "never had any real problems on *The Wall*", he experienced being "stood over a few times ... by standover boys, you know, 'this is my part of *The Wall*, you know, 'fuck off idiot'" [7(291,295)]. However, Jeffrey was able to defend himself, in the first instance by having a "good reputation on the streets of Sydney for being a little bit psycho, which is probably a good thing" [7(295)].

Threats and fear are a constant within the SMSW scene. Sometimes the threat is a matter of posturing but the resultant fear is nonetheless real. At other times, the threat may precede actual violence. Shaun's first set of encounters at *The Wall* involved the client and then a fellow worker. First, there was the sex work and then Shaun "got rolled for" the money he earned. The threat was serious—"if I didn't give it to him he was just going to cave my head in" [16(507)]—and the loss for Shaun on that occasion was more significant: dignity and money.

Encounters while relating within SMSW are many and varied. It is not simply an isolated enclave where the main protagonists—a young male and a client—quietly engage with people and the environment. It is a place where many and varied *others* inhabit the environment. Some of the characters are positive, such as health workers. Others exercise a negative influence over the complex relationships that infuse the sex work environment. It is a volatile environment of ceaselessly passing traffic. These include: homophobic louts out for violent sport, clients in need of a sexual fix, and needy young people searching for survival and some for drugs.

Jack was never hurt at *The Wall* or with clients but did experience having "bottles thrown and eggs thrown" [26(1402)]. He developed some clear relational rules that guided his engagement with the SMSW scene:

As much as I was in the sex scene, I tried to, when I wasn't doing sex work, try and stay as completely as far away from it as I could. I didn't socialise with sex workers apart from the ones that I'd known before I got into it like Les and that. So I didn't make friends in the sex industry. I kept it as far out of my personal life as I could.

**Jack 26(1410)**

The tapestry of narratives that break open what it means to engage the SMSW scene are, by and large, about negative and uncontrolled encounters, where the risk is high and safety is impaired as survival is sought. For Jack, the only way to survive is to create a demarcation between the encounters embedded in the sex work experience and those of his personal life, which are, necessarily away from *The Wall*. Within this frame of reference, *The Wall* is work and one's personal life is away from the SMSW scene. Other young males who engage with *The Wall*

environment have a different perspective on this demarcation and their reflections are not all negative.

Peter described his prior history, SMSW experience, and behaviour towards others at *The Wall* in terms of abuse and violence. He also described psychologically positive experiences:

[He] met a lot of nice people. I even met a lot of gay people that were really nice, didn't want anything from me. Just wanted to help me out, take me out for dinner sometimes, just to be good company. There was a lot of people like that I met ... Sometimes I met them if I went to the club or something like that.

Peter 20(299, 303)

For Jack, enriching life with more positive relational experiences occurred because of the development of a life away from *The Wall*. For Peter, a similar end point was sought but from within the SMSW environment. One pathway for achieving that relational enrichment was by seeking different clients within other potential sex work environments: searching inner city gay clubs and bars was one such strategy.

Relatively positive sex work relationships and experiences can result in a reframing of SMSW. In combination with the skills that predate involvement at *The Wall*, the SMSW experience can be carved into a relatively manageable set of emotions and events. However, the positive SMSW experience is fundamentally chaotic, and positive experiences are accidental in their origin and nature. Richard's first experience at *The Wall* at 14 was imbued, at least at first, with a level of ease. He had sex "with a guy" and "it was really nice". He was "a regular of most of the boys" at *The Wall* and "was quite understanding" [1(92)]. As he indicates:

There are quite a few people [clients] that actually do help you out there. I met quite a few of them. They made you feel, you know, they gave you encouragement, support, you know, mentally and physically, you know, yeah, just a shoulder to cry on, someone to listen to you. I've had many clients where, you know, they've paid for sex and copped an ear bashing from you.

Richard 1(348)

The events are defined as positive and supportive, and yet the psychological experience is negative. Like other young males, Richard "sort of blocked it out and just thought of something else, you know. That's what really got [him] through the job, I reckon, just blocking it

out thinking” [1(92)]. Thus, notwithstanding the relatively positive encounter had by Richard in his first SMSW experience,

When I got back [to *The Wall*], I was straight into the drugs and then that sort of helped me block out, block it out, you know. Yeah, then the next day I felt really low. My self-esteem was rock bottom. Feelings! I didn't know what to feel, didn't know how to take it.

Richard 1(92)

While “understanding” clients mediate a relative positive SMSW experience, these encounters are mounted upon existing hopes and desires, and these continue to influence the interpretation of sex work experiences:

After the first one when I was telling you about the drive home, you know, all my dreams were shattered, my whole world got shattered and ever since then I was just down, you know, I was just — when I was going to get my next money, where I was going to get my next drugs. They were my only sort of, you know, happiness really.

Richard 1(344)

Conscious dreaming holds the internal language of hopes, expectations and desires. Even where the SMSW encounter is positive for Richard, this other body of thought bleeds through into the SMSW experiences and is the ultimate arbiter of experience.

Dennis began MSW by accident. He was 16 or 17 at the time, was frequenting the gay bars near Oxford Street, exploring his own sexual identity and searching for people to support a lifestyle that he observed gay people leading. This desire for a different life led him to establish relationships that he eventually defined as sex work. What surprised him was that he “didn't realise that you could sort of get so much money for it. Like when [he] first started doing it, like, [he] thought that, not that you just come in and rely on it for income but it just, like, if you were lucky, like, you can, like, just be in the right spot at the right time” [2(91)].

Dennis engaged in sexual experimentation: “I was bisexual but, like, I wanted to have sex with guys anyway” [2(147)]. It was the framing of the experience by others that alerted him to a new phenomenon — sex work. The defining of this type of relational encounter was a *surprising* epiphany:

I knew the guy for a little while and like we'd never sort of done anything sexually but when we did like he gave me money for it and that. Like I was sort of like a little bit surprised even.

**Dennis 2(131)**

For Dennis, the motivation for contact with other males was complex. There was a primary desire for relating, and yet, there was also physical attraction to men, and sex was desired. Also driving his reach into the inner city was the desire to access nice places, “cool” venues and a different lifestyle. At 16, and while there was an accidental quality in this drive to discover, it was also guided, focussed, and structured. There were venues, processes, and goals to be achieved and Dennis set about crafting the relationships into a style that satisfied both his physical and emotional needs:

Dennis: He was pretty good. Like, I still see him and that sometimes.

DL: On a friendship basis or on a work basis?

Dennis: Sort of both. Like sometimes I go over and he doesn't want to do anything but we'll go out and sort of get a pizza or something or you know, go and watch a movie and stuff ... I don't really mind going out with him socially and that now. Like the only worry for me was like what my friends would think, you know.

**Dennis 2(158-163)**

While Dennis tried to integrate apparently disparate aspects in life—heterosexual life context, homosexual experimentation—there was also an ongoing awareness of the social stigma attached to MSW and this confronted his desire to bring disparate aspects of life into a whole.

Relating to, and in, the SMSW scene is a complex endeavour. Relating is easy for some and difficult for others: positive and negative, connective and disengaged. However, one thing was common to all the participants. They existed in an environment populated with relationships and these were crucial in the development of their thinking about significant matters: material issues, psychosocial needs, and most significantly, about self. The relationships they established at *The Wall* and beyond followed on from other relationships developed through childhood and adolescence. Whether experienced as positive or negative, all of these relationships were equally influential on identity formation, the management of life events and the creation of pathways into the future. It is the connection of these relationships to identity formation within the SMSW

scene—stories of *dissonance and congruence*—that are evident in the next emergent theme arising within this examination of relationship in the lives of young males engaged in SMSW.

### **Relating to self: Dissonance and identity formation**

While young males who frequent *The Wall* have many desires—material security and relationships being two primary ones—they also experience a thwarting of these desires and their goals. This thwarting can occur because of poverty, substance abuse, homelessness and other personal and environmental factors such as their prior experience of abuse. A thwarting of desire can also occur because of a clash between a new or repetitive experience and the person's thinking about self. A crisis in the formation of ideas about self can result. Dissonance and disconnection can be pervasive consequences in this crisis and they arise because the clash between experience and thinking creates, or energises, what can become unrelenting critical internal narratives. These internal dialogues generate a critical and self-deprecating form of questioning. There is doubt and struggle and these can also result in cognitive and environmental chaos.

As noted earlier in this chapter, Richard spoke clearly of this clash of ideas and experience when he recounted his first sex work encounter. Once the client had gone and he was alone, he knew that “all [his] dreams were shattered. [His] whole world got shattered and ever since then [he] was just down” [1(344)]. The ideas about self—developed slowly and quietly over many years—collapsed under the reality of an experience that was not congruent with those prior thoughts, dreams and directions. For him, thinking based on that experience left him with an internalised dissonance: “all my goals, my dreams, everything was just shattered, then and there” [1(212)]. It was not that the experience was physically painful or abusive for Richard because on that first occasion “it was really nice” [1(92)]. The psychological dissonance emerged later in his

thinking, when he was alone, and attempting to make sense of a radically new experience. At that point, he concluded: “I think the impact was [on] my beliefs, my will to live went” [1(212)].

For some young males (for example, Richard) recovery from a position of dissonance is possible. In the end, Richard was able to galvanise his thinking about such experiences into a positive frame of reference. He compared that experience with later developments in his thinking: “Then I was so immature, now I’m more mature. It’s made my dreams. It’s pushing me to do my dreams” [1(212)]. While Richard’s first encounter produced an internalised dissonance, he also possessed a drive towards, and ability for, consolidation. It was a desire to make something out of the raw life experience. His “then” and “now” reflect a form of resilience: a capacity to mount adaptive responses in the face of adversity.

For young males at *The Wall*, their lives are not simply about the raw experience of life that is often embedded within relationships. Thought penetrates and accompanies life events, and while at times these thoughts are blocked or denied, thinking nonetheless occurs, and the aim of that thinking is to make sense of the phenomena so that dissonance does not overwhelm life, thereby creating an internalised chaos. Where thinking cannot make sense of experience, other management strategies come into play.

Drake also identified as gay. He experienced child sexual abuse within the home. Rather than registering a sustained cognitive dissonance, he was able to develop a way of thinking about events that allowed him to move forward. His approach was:

I would still sort of go on, just go, “Well it happened didn’t it. Oh well, better get to work in the morning. Go to sleep now Drake”. Yeah, it’s like that. I just kind of see; I almost put the worst things that could possibly happen to people, and just sort of go, “they’re not that bad, you know; it’s not that bad; worser [sic] things have happened to people, you know.”

**Drake 6(663)**

This self-talk—the reframing of experience so that it is incorporated into life without dissonance—is a significant achievement for Drake brought about by the relativisation of experience. Drake compared his experience with other more difficult scenarios known to, or observed by, him. This thinking about self and events—a cognitive reframing—allowed him to

gain a new and positive perspective, thereby allowing him to experience comfort and maintain hope.

Like Drake, Dominic (22) experienced sexual abuse at seven years of age. He was then led into sex work at around 11 or 12. While the opportunistic sex work was framed as abuse, he also sought other ways to help him incorporate the abuse into a more positive frame of reference. He describes his experience as an “opportunity”. He “got raped when [he] was younger, so [he] figured if [he] can make some money off it, it’s a good thing” [22(151)]. The reframing of abuse as a financial opportunity appeared to him as a legitimate cognitive response in the face of a significant and damaging series of events. Unlike Drake, his reframing led him to choices that he would later regret: “but I didn’t realise 10 years later, I would be in the same place [sex work], you know what I mean” [22(151)]. What, as a child, appeared as a logical response to abusive events ultimately led Dominic to the experience of being stuck “in the same place” and ongoing sex work. He was unable to remove himself from the frame of reference he had—of necessity and without guidance—created as *his* way of making sense of *his* world.

There is a flow-on effect for Dominic since his abhorrence of remaining in sex work also requires cognitive and physical management. Substance use became his chosen method for managing negative experiences. It was generated by his experience of childhood abuse and by his subsequent involvement in sex work. He spoke of the connection between abuse, sex work and substance use: “I don’t know if I would have started drugs or not. I probably would have but not to the extent. I would have just been a recreational drug user probably, I don’t know, instead of like a full-on junkie” [22(175)].

Sexual abuse was a confronting experience. It created an immediate dissonance for Dominic that nonetheless demanded a response. Although sex work was chosen as the method of managing the abuse, the management tool itself required management: “I wouldn’t have started sex work if [sexual abuse] hadn’t happened” [22(175)]. Experience commands thought and this directs behaviour. For Dominic, thinking about abuse led to thinking about

opportunistic sex. This transitioned into sex work. Ultimately, all three experiences affirmed the need for substance use as a management tool. Abuse and sex work combined, intensified the need for substance use and turned him into “a full-on junkie”. This is where the stuck-ness occurs, for “after you’ve done it [SMSW], it’s like hard to go back to earning \$400 a week for five days work, you know what I mean. Because you can make \$400 in a night, you know what I mean” [22(271)].

For Dominic, there is a non-linear, dynamic form of *domino effect* that occurs from the moment of sexual abuse. Events and environment combine with rudimentary thinking to create new unregulated life directions. The effect was not simply in behavioural terms but, most significantly, in his thinking about self and future. What transpired from that point was chaotic and negative thinking about self that translated into negative and self-deprecating behaviour within self. It was opportunistic survival sex, sex work, and substance use, all against a backdrop of disengaged family and homelessness. For Dominic, by the time of the interview at age 22, it had been 15 years since the sexual abuse began and 10 years since he first engaged in sex work.

Dominic searched for ways and means by which he could manage the relentlessness of this cycle. He wanted to understand the phenomena in which he was located, which he helped to create in an ongoing way. He used *The Wall* as the primary source of his developing understanding. He set his own experience against that of others and, by comparing and contrasting his experience of sex work with that of others, came to an understanding and some conclusions about the meaning within his experience. By observing other males engaged in SMSW, he noted what he perceived to be their sexual orientation and drew conclusions about the outcome he and they experienced out of SMSW:

I’m jealous of the boys that are gay that go up there [to *The Wall*] because they can make the money and go home and do whatever they want to do. Whereas the boys that are straight, they’ve all got to go get drugs afterwards to forget about what they have had to do to get the money.

Dominic 22(435)

For Dominic, the selling of sex would have been easier if he had been homosexual in orientation. He would not have had to blot out the experience by using drugs, and the value of his work would have increased:

It would be good to be able to go and do a job and then go and save the money to pay rent or whatever instead of having to go and get on [use heroin].

Dominic 22(435)

For Dominic, SMSW was only ever experienced as a negative experience because of his sexual orientation, the association of it with prior abuse, and the need—because of both factors—to suppress the experience and the memory through substance use. What emerged from the abuse, sex work and substance use was a collection of thoughts about self that while, not forming a cohesive whole, were nonetheless pervasive and negative. Thinking about a positive picture of self, capable of sustaining a brighter future, was a problematic endeavour because of the experiences that fragmented the image of self.

Leyton (20) identified as heterosexual. While there were positive outcomes for him from involvement in SMSW because “it’s given [him] insight onto people: how people are, how people work”, there were also negative consequences. These emerged because “it’s had a pretty big emotional impact, because [he was] straight” [27(471)]. Like Dominic, the fact that he was “straight” made a difference not simply to the physical experience but also (and perhaps more significantly) to the emotional content of SMSW. Here, heroin use (“using”) played an important role in his management of thoughts and ideas that, for him, came from the client:

Leyton: Using: it’s like a reward for having to do something horrible. Do you know what I mean? So you use, not to, like “oh fuck, look what I’ve just done, I’ll go have a shot of heroin to block that out”, but that’s how it is, sort of, to an extent, you know. You use drugs because, you know, you feel whatever you feel from the fuckin. You’re getting these feelings off these people and you don’t like it so, you know, you block it out with something.

DL: What sort of feelings?

Leyton: Guilt, being hurt, being used, being vulnerable.

Leyton 27(554-559)

The “feelings” that he absorbed “off these people” caused a corruption or fragmentation in his thinking and his sense of self. He was invaded by *the other* and this left him with feelings of guilt,

of being hurt, used and vulnerable. The experience required a practical response. He needed to “block it out with something” and heroin was the chosen method for dealing with invasive experiences and thoughts.

Similar experiences were shared by Allan (22). The acts were not viewed as repugnant but the confrontation with prior thinking about self was the experience that shattered his stability. Allan felt “small” [8(231)] and “dirty on [him]self” [8(235)] as a result of SMSW. What was striking was the naivety: “he just wanted to give me a blow job” [8(247)] and “that was all he wanted and like I didn’t see no problem with that” [8(251)]. While the presumption may be that the sexual acts caused the fragmentation, this was not the case for Allan:

I don’t think it was such the sexual acts, I’m pretty sure it was just my own mind, like thinking cause I’d always been brought up to be male/woman sort of relationship and in any manner or form.

**Allan 8(259)**

Allan’s prior thinking was heading in a particular direction. He was heterosexual and the belief was that sexual acts in general should be between a male and a female. His SMSW experience confronted that formed reality: “it sort of shocked my system” [8(263)]. SMSW undermined his thinking about self and relationships:

Well, of course it’s going to make you feel bad like doing something like you’ve never done in your entire life before. You’ve been brought up as a believer that it’s Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve. Like you’re just thrown in the middle of it all and you can’t really help but experiment when you’re that age and that’s what I did and well, here I am today.

**Allan 8(411)**

He felt “bad” as a result of the experiences he had at 15. His developed beliefs were challenged and, given his history, the events were something over which he had limited, if any, control.

Shaun also experienced an internal dissonance that was initiated because he was blind to what people really wanted from him. The sex work events were tagged immediately as “always a bad experience” [16(673)] and something that was “hated” because of “the whole homosexual thing”. He was “straight. [He did not] want to get into it” [16(679)]. In spite of the desire not to be “into it”, he was involved and this involvement created confusion on a range of levels.

While Dominic and Leyton had their thinking about self confronted, the chaos for them arose because they acted against what they believed was their natural pathway of sexual expression. For Shaun, the experience of SMSW confronted his thinking and rather than the chaos appearing only in his behaviour, it was also pervasive in his ongoing thinking about his sexual identity: “I have gone through being straight, gay, bi, about six or seven times” [16(827)]. The confusion he experienced appeared relentless and connected to his involvement in SMSW:

Yeah. Like even daily I'd go, “oh yeah, whatever”, then change my mind the next day, the next day, the next day and the next day. I wouldn't have even touched drugs at all, not even smoked pot if I didn't go down there in the first place.

**Shaun 16(831)**

For Shaun, there were several elements to the confusion in his thinking about self in the world. The first arose because of the physiological elements of the encounter. Shaun was sexually aroused during the SMSW encounters. Even though he understood that “genetically, it has to happen; there's spots that it hits and [arousal] has to happen” he also admits that he did “get ashamed that it's happening because you're straight” [16(687)]. Thoughts create confusion but physical reactions also intensify confusion: both generate shame.

This confusion of thinking about self was consolidated and made ongoing because of his fluctuating sexual identity. The confusion around identity seemed never ending for Shaun. Further, it was made real and concrete for him because he had “fallen in love before” [16(695)]. This was with “Malcolm and another guy, Jason; both I used to work with” [16(699)]. Shaun worked *The Wall*, found this to be repugnant, was unsure about his sexual identity, and yet fell “in love” with two other workers. Shaun “asked” Jason “to marry” him. This happened “about a week before he died” [16(719)] by suicide. Both his love for Jason and Jason's death were so confronting for Shaun that he remembered it, “like it was yesterday and that sort of scared me into straightness I guess too. I didn't want that happening again” [16(715)]. The long term consequences of his SMSW-driven confusion around sexual identity produced a closing down of emotional expression and connection. As he explained: “that's why I'm so closed. I don't show

feelings, emotions, nothing because every time you do, it just ends up hurting someone” [16(723)].

In the previous chapter and again here in this chapter, we hear about Steph and Drake who both identify as homosexual. This appeared to them as a key factor in the way that they managed their SMSW experiences. We hear about Dominic, Leyton and Shaun who also recount similar precursor experiences: fractured family, abuse, friendships, the transition to opportunistic sex, and finally to sex work and substance use. Sexual orientation was a key element in the exploration of meaning and life direction for all these participants. Premature sexualisation, which is defined as abuse, is always regarded as negative and destructive to thinking on self. Where it is not defined as abuse, the definition appears different. Sexual identity is a mediating factor. It influences thinking about childhood and later experiences in SMSW. Where dissonance emerges because experience negatively confronts prior thinking about self, the capacity for management of adverse experience is compromised. This is because of uncontrolled invasive negative thought. The chosen method for managing these thoughts and the dissonance is substance use. This is equally dissipating of self. Existential dissonance is central to understanding the complex experience of those engaged in SMSW. It is also crucial in understanding the impact on another aspect of relating to self: the experience of *relating to sexual safety* in respect of self and others.

### **Relating to sexual safety: SMSW, psychosocial and physical health**

Since around 1990, research literature on MSW began a slow then rapid shift towards issues of personal and public safety in the face of HIV and AIDS. From that point, it has been impossible to think about, or develop an understanding of, SMSW without considering how those engaged in SMSW relate to sexual safety. What is equally clear at this point is that relating

to safety has both psychosocial and physical elements as these two strands weave through the whole SMSW experience.

Sex work at *The Wall* is a dangerous business. Relating to self and to others in a safe manner, while imperative for survival, is not a clear cut process. Personal and environmental factors impact on the process of negotiating safety. Negotiation itself is not always a possibility. The most crucial of the primary factors that impact on safety is that of age. Some males are exposed to sex work at *The Wall*, and in other environments, at an age where the capacity to negotiate and to understand consequences is limited. The type of clients encountered also plays a significant role in the thinking and processing that may produce safe sex. Safety in sexual practices is further problematised when age issues, and difficult client characteristics, combine in the one sexual encounter. For example, one of Richard's early encounters was with a person who "was very rough" [1(296)]. He "tried to have sex with [him] without a condom". Richard "put up a fight" because he "wouldn't have sex without a condom; you know, it's *The Wall*, you just don't." [1(300)]. The struggle for Richard came not just in the form of physical pressure to have unsafe sex; there was a psychological component to the pressure. Beyond sheer force, some clients use a non-physical form of persuasion that depletes the young male, making them more vulnerable or susceptible to the prospect of unsafe sex. As Richard continued: "he was just, you know, he was arguing, you know, calling me names, you know, just making me feel really rock bottom" [1(300)]. With Richard, who was HIV positive, the psychological weakening of resolve, even where knowledge is present, can impact seriously on his capacity to practice safe sex.

For Damien, who was of an age where being aware and protective were mutually exclusive, substance use also played a significant role. As he indicated, "we smoked heaps of cones and had a couple of lines and I didn't even know what it was. I found out later it was heroin" [4(71)]. While this form of coercion is problematic for anyone, it is especially so for a homeless boy of 13. What added to the sinister quality of the encounter was that the drug-induced stupor was the context for exploitation:

I was so out of it and I think I was asleep or something and I woke up and thought, “What’s going on here kind of thing?” and just kind of went back to sleep I was that out of it. He was kind of really sneaky about it, you know, like trying to do it when I was out of it and then gradually it started, you know, became more obvious and he was more up-front about it and, you know, I was, I didn’t really want it. But, you know, I was kind of stuck because I became a bit dependent on him, you know, being young and having someone there, it was sort of like a dad almost, you know, looking after me and getting me anything I wanted. Yeah, so that was, you know, it was a bit of a trap.

**Damien 4(75)**

There was a great deal of harm to be experienced at a psychosocial and physical level that was age-related. That said, growth and the gathering of experience and thought can produce a different perspective on how the person relates to safety. At the time of the research interview, Damien was able to hold a different perspective on safety as an aspect of relating to self: “I guess, growing up in a lot of refuges and stuff I was pretty well educated and, you know, hazards and stuff. Safe sex and stuff like that” [4(468)]. Time, a different type of support environment, thinking and life experience itself, all combined to produce a very different aspect on safety and a greater level of control.

With Cory (23), who was older than Richard and Damien when he began sex work, the psychological pressure did not impinge on his thinking and behaviour in the same way, so as he indicated, “the client wanted to have unprotected sex and I didn’t want to have unprotective sex, and we just had this really big argument, and so I just told him to keep his money and I left” [24(663)]. Cory’s capacity to reach such a point was not only about negotiation but also about a psychological maturity—a sense of self—that emerged only with age. It was a crucial factor in the participant being able to withstand the psychological pressure that was applied where the client wished to have unsafe sex. At times the pressure to take part in sex or perform sexual acts that are not desired can occur through the administration of drugs.

Cory began sex work when he was 18 and was 23 at the time of the interview. His understanding about safe sex was clear and his protestation with his client about safe sex was equally forthright, and yet negotiating safe sex could still be difficult:

One time this year, I didn’t have safe sex. But that wasn’t a job. That was something really stupid I did ... ’cause it was *Mardi Gras* night and I was really drunk and I wanted to get with this other

guy, but this other guy was interested and I sort of realised that we weren't using anything, and I didn't say anything.

**Cory 24(807,811)**

There was a timely lack of awareness and the loss of a capacity for negotiation as a result of intoxication. Significant risk was one result but regret and anxiety also emerged as a consequence for Cory:

I sort of was really nervous. I rang up. I think I rang up Julie and said, "I've had unprotected sex and I'm really nervous". So she said to get it checked. I did.

**Cory 24(835)**

While anxious and fearful, he was not immobilised and was able to connect with his welfare worker [Julie], regain a sense of direction, and seek medical assistance. This episode affirmed an understanding that a determined response to issues of safety is not immovable. Circumstantial factors, like age, state, and desire, do impact on perspective and capacity. This can be in both a positive and negative manner. Age is significant. However, access to an environment that supports ongoing safety appears crucial.

Drake also articulated this developing awareness of risk, the need for safety, the role of assessment and the place of others in supporting ongoing safe responses. There is the ever-present,

Risk of being beaten up, risk of not getting paid, risk of, you know, being subjected to something you don't want to do; rape in other words. And it could be rape by all sorts of things. You might get fisted, you might get fucked by two guys, you might have to have sex with a chick when you get there to the place, you know; there's all sorts of things. You have to be able to go, "it's too much of a risk" or "it's worth the risk". I had a few bad experiences and subsequently, I learnt to also sort of have little codes and deal with, like with other workers

**Drake 6(491)**

Within the context of "risk" and danger, being able to rely on the presence of another worker to assist and to help avoid harm is also framed as an important factor that comes into play when trying to relate with safety. It is the presence of others that may assist in deciding whether it is "too much of a risk" or "worth the risk".

A significant theme connected with all of these elements is the issue of control within the sex work environment. Mark made clear his position in respect to sex at *The Wall*, and the matter of safety, but he also made it clear that there was a tussle that occurred between his principles and the reality of working at *The Wall*:

There were some guys who wouldn't want to use condoms and that sort of stuff but I'd make them do because I don't trust anyone when you're working the streets like that. They treat you like dirt. Like clients treat you like dirt. They're paying for your services and you have got to give them what you want and if you don't well, anything can happen really and that does scare me.

**Mark 11(251)**

Clients treat you "like dirt" and although you have principles around sex work and safety, there are risks and demands over which it is difficult to exercise control. Notwithstanding the drama inherent in this difficult to negotiate scenario, "you have to give them what *you* want" rather than what they want. It is clear that "anything can happen" if control of the sex work environment is not maintained. Of course, and as we saw with other males engaged in SMSW, this does not always happen. Germaine was also aware of the dangers and the drama of control associated with working at *The Wall*. He also recognised the need to gain support if the practice of safe sex was to be maintained:

Everywhere you go there's always going to be a sex worker and that sex worker could one day be in danger and if they've got nobody to call or whatever or let know about that danger, then nothing can be done.

**Germaine 25(271)**

However, he also had experiences of not having control within this dangerous environment. While you need support and assistance, in the main, SMSW is a solo experience and this brings with it, a high level of unpredictability:

We got back to these guys' apartments and we had sex and everything like this but these guys did drugs and everything like that so we had a bit of a drug pig and everything like this but once we started having sex and that I ended up getting tied up. Now I told these guys that I didn't like getting tied up but they didn't listen.

**Germaine 25(219)**

Within such a context, safety can never be assured. The combination of drugs and extra clients meant that a loss of control was inevitable:

There was two of them. I had kind of vaged out [sic] a little bit and couldn't remember anything else but when I woke up the next morning, no one was home, I was untied and my face was black and blue.

**Germaine 25(223)**

Beyond the breach of safety that was evident in the experience of multiple clients combined with substance abuse, there was a set of psychological consequences that further complicated the loss of control. This produced an ongoing impact on Germaine and further compromised his safety:

That kind of took me a week or two to forget about that but I would never think of the situation because I was too worried about knocking my emotions out with drugs. So that's what basically spun me around, was having the issue dealt with was me taking drugs to deal with the issues.

**Germaine 25(231)**

It was a vicious circle. There was the need for sex work for survival. Substances were involved to assist in coping with the SMSW experience. Thus there was a lack of awareness and capacity for insight and assessment. A loss of control followed, as did the experiences of abuse. Further substance abuse was evident, again in order to cope. His psychosocial and physical health was compromised at every point in this complex and ever-changing situation.

Other participants had a far better system of client assessment—because of age-related thinking and skills development—that formed an essential part of their protection strategy. Negotiation and control were essential and positive outcomes. Dennis took the approach that he would “sort of go with them once for sex and then, like, that's it you know”. As soon as he discovered “they're a bastard”, he “sort of cut them off” [2(271)]. His fundamental approach to safety and STIs was clear:

I always do safe sex and that. Like even if I'm just going to do oral sex I always use a condom and stuff like that. Like I even use a condom when I fuck my girlfriend; not 'cause of diseases and that, just 'cause I don't want her to get pregnant but still I, even in my relationship, I have safe sex.

**Dennis 2(435)**

And to complete the approach: “I always make it clear, like, what I'm going to set out to do and stuff anyway. So they always know in advance” [2(399)]. Safety is about: clear ideas about safety, upfront guidelines to clients, and a filtering system to dispense with unwanted clients. These were

the core elements in Dennis' safe sex approach. It also ensured a higher level of control than other males engaged in SMSW.

At times, positive and educative prior experiences also create the context for a clear understanding that protection and the maintenance of safety is imperative. Jack's age and prior experience led him to positive and protective measures:

I was immunised against both Hep A and Hep B before I started sex work. I was doing private hospital work so I didn't really have to worry about those, but yeah, no illnesses. I mean, I've never had any STD. I've been really lucky actually, also very picky with my clients and like extremely picky.

**Jack 26(266)**

Even with a positive and educative context that highlighted in a practical manner the need for protection, Jack also highlighted the element of risk through the presence of "luck".

Age is a key factor in the development of awareness, the development of a capacity for understanding of consequences, and an ability to assess for psychosocial and physical safety. However, age is not an absolute guarantee of the existence of these essential processes in respect of safe sexual practices. Jeffrey had experience from an early age of abuse, sexual exploitation within an institution and a clear understanding of the need for safety in sexual practices because of prior family experience. As he indicated,

My sister used to be a pro, my older sister used to be a pro in Melbourne and she scored HIV through unprotected sex and it was only once that she had unprotected sex. That was it. That was a wakeup call for me. I started making it a point, even with oral sex; I had to have a condom. I don't like the taste of latex rubber. Nowadays, you get flavoured condoms so there shouldn't be any excuse.

**Jeffery 7(444)**

Jeffrey clearly had a rule that he practised safe sex and there "shouldn't be any excuse" in relation to this rule. However, he then further clarified the rule by adding, that this applied when he didn't "know the customer" [7(436)]. Thus, there was a second rule and this impacted significantly on his thinking regarding his safe sexual practices.

There's only three people I have sex with, without a condom, and that's because they're in their late fifties, early sixties, they don't go down *The Wall*. They haven't been down *The Wall* for a good six years, seven years.

Jeffrey 7(436)

Jeffrey comments exposed the delusions of safety founded on the myths of safety. These myths arose out of a belief that age excluded disease and that time away from *The Wall* also excluded disease. But age and distance from *The Wall* were not the only grounds upon which such judgements were made.

Mark also had myths about the type of people that are safe to be with when he indicated that “I always knew [that] the right people to go with are the ones in Mercedes Benz, you know: rich people” [11(303)]. As it was for Jeffrey, this form of assessment was based on myth and intuition and was both flawed and potentially dangerous. For Mark, the decision to use wealth as a point of judgement resulted in at least one negative encounter:

I got picked up by one of these guys who had a chauffeur and that was one of the worst experiences I ever had. We ended up going back to this shelter. I always make sure I tell them what I do and what I don't do before I get into the car and he said, “Yeah okay, jump in then”. So I jumped in the car and when we got to this place, he ended up pulling a bag of cocaine out and wanted me to take that, which I didn't. In the end he wanted more than just what I was prepared to do and he ended up forcing himself on me.

Mark 11(319,323)

Sexual identity also plays a role in the development of safe sexual practices. For Leyton, the rationale was simple. Because he was heterosexual, sex with men within a working context was unpleasant:

Like, I don't like giving oral sex. It's a hard thing for me to do. So I put a condom on to avoid the taste and stuff like that.

Leyton 27(387)

While an abhorrence of oral sex with men acted as a protective factor and ensured safe sexual practices for Leyton in sex work, he was a sexual being in other circumstances and this was where a split occurred in this thinking. An internal clash along the lines of sexual identity can produce unsafe situations. For example, Nick identified as heterosexual. He had myths around safety in his sex encounters, written along identity lines, and these controlled his thinking in respect to his health practices:

Because basically the females that I have had sex with, they're my girlfriends. I know where they've been, I know that they shower, I know that, you know, I know where they've been pretty much. Whereas a client or a john or somebody that I classify as a friend, I don't know where they've been. I don't know where they have been 15 minutes before, but I make them have a shower beforehand anyway just to make sure. I make them put on a condom anyway.

Nick 23(455)

Nick had safe sex with males but unsafe and unprotected sex with females. The assessment and decision making processes centred on an understanding of the situation gained from appearance. Rather than being about health practices, based on sound knowledge and education, his health strategies and sex practices were based on knowledge gained from superficial observation—of whether the person was clean—or myth. It is this that appeared important in terms of protecting health. For clients and friends, a shower and a condom are the constituent factors in maintaining good health and protecting him from STIs. For girlfriends, neither is a prerequisite for sexual contact. If Nick knew where they had been for longer than the 15 minutes prior to their contact with him, then, in his mind, he possessed knowledge upon which he was able to make sound health judgements. This was flawed thinking in relation to psychosocial and physical health. What resulted was a complex and variable set of health practices, in relation to safety, that were equally flawed and potentially harmful.

Within the context of danger, risk, the difficulty in establishing and maintaining control, and the variable attempts at relating to self and others in terms of safety, it is evident that in many of the participants there flourished a desire or need to move on from SMSW. While this is partly because of dissonant experiences that can only be sustained for so long, the desire to find *pathways out of SMSW* is evident in all of the participants. As with their experience within SMSW, the creation of pathways out of SMSW and the choice to *remain or go* is heavily influenced by their actual experience while in SMSW. The choice to remain or go and the pathways out of SMSW is an area that also requires consideration in the study of males engaged in SMSW.

## Remain or go: Pathways out of SMSW

One thing is absolutely clear in SMSW; there is a *shelf life* for males engaged in MSW. People who seek out a person and pay for sex are after certain qualities, and youthfulness is one of those qualities. It appears that there is a constant awareness—with most of the participants—that exploring other lifestyle and work options must be on the agenda. They are aware of their vulnerability and fragility, perhaps more than most, and they are certainly aware of the temporal nature of their appeal.

For Jules (23), who considered working *The Wall* but decided to advertise his services elsewhere, part of the rationale for change and development was to achieve a greater level of integration and openness in life:

The job screws with me socially that way and also, when I do meet people, they go, “What do you do?” and then I’ve either got to take the chance that they’re going to be cool or I’ve got to lie; and there’s problems with both. I’m going to be interested to see what happens working in real estate to see how that diversifies my social circle.

**Jules 18b(236-237)**

Regardless of the modality of MSW, hiddenness is a consistent feature in the experience and this requires significant management that inevitably results in some degree of social isolation.

Some possess a level of ambivalence about remaining involved with SMSW but have a pragmatic position on any movement away from SMSW. For Germaine, it was a negative experience because he “always found it to be downgrading, low and disgusting” [25(127)], but he managed the experience by holding onto the core aspect of SMSW as he saw it:

I felt that I was able to pull a job off when I was out of it or whenever because I wouldn’t actually be concentrating on what I was doing. I would be thinking, okay, I am doing this for the money: just think about the money in my pocket. That is all I ever thought about.

**Germaine 25(123)**

Though he has “never been happy” [25(127)] working *The Wall*, it was viewed as a necessity for him because of homelessness, isolation and poverty. For Germaine, remaining in SMSW was a tragic experience that must be glossed over if involvement was to be sustained. At 22 and HIV positive, he was emaciated, and his life was dominated by substance use. He was balding, with

few and mostly rotting teeth. Despite this stark reality, he fabricated an image and persona that allowed him to sustain involvement in SMSW: “as they say, if you’ve got it, flaunt it” [25(127)]. With such a scenario, developing a *pathway out* was difficult and so a *pathway within* the experience was crafted:

I preferably, in my own mind, don’t want to work but for the regular clients that I did used to see and that know that I am positive. Yes, I do occasionally do the odd job here and there. But other than that I don’t go up to Darlington Road any more. I don’t go to brothels.

**Germaine 25(131)**

Although he was still engaged in MSW, Jules sought an alternative pathway while, partly out of financial necessity, Germaine continued in SMSW and was resigned to remaining somewhere within the MSW scene.

For Adam (21) who began SMSW at age 15, MSW was less socially unacceptable than criminal activity. Both place you in the public gaze. However, the potential negative judicial outcomes from SMSW are more palatable:

I always saw it exactly that, as working. See, I’d much prefer to go and work than to go and break into a car or house or something to get money. I mean, the other fact that I, my cocaine habit was fully financed by other people.

**Adam 14(664)**

The need to remain in SMSW, or some other high-paying employment, was evident for Adam when cocaine use was factored into his consideration about a pathway forward. SMSW provided experiences that diverted his gaze to other directions, mainly because “with several clients [he] connected quite strongly on an intellectual level, which has been beneficial” [14(852)]. Access to people who work in a variety of professions, “everything from accounting to lawyers” [14(860)], provided an environment for thinking about other occupations. Even more significantly, Adam was able to use the contact with his clients in SMSW to gain access to other people who might be able to assist him to form a new pathway forward:

One guy who used to work for the City Council, and talking to him about business propositions and that, and he gave me a name and number of this lady who works at Bankstown City Council and she was the, oh what’s the position, she was like in charge of trying to get small business to come into the Bankstown area. And just things like that, just a form of networking was quite, or

has been quite strong and has led me down different paths and being able to succeed in some areas.

**Adam 14(860)**

The end result was that Adam refined his ideas about a pathway forward and experimented with moving in a new direction. "IT development" became an area of interest and, from the connections he gained in SMSW and the awakening interest in IT, he began a process of change:

I have been trying desperately to start up my own business for the past, say, four months, no, almost six months I'd say. It's taking a lot of time, a lot of effort, and a lot of money that I don't have.

**Adam (14/949-956)**

For some males engaged in SMSW, the past is always present, with omnipresent qualities that exact an ongoing influence. Peter, for example, experienced the lasting impact of prior relationships as they were projected into current experience, making survival almost impossible. Even though he was resilient, he was also fractured at a psychological level:

My uncle tried sexually to touch me and stuff like that. I remember there was a time when I was selling myself. I remember one bloke, I was pretty out of it and I think he had sex with me and I was trying to get away from him but I couldn't because I was only small. This was when I first started and I tried to block all that out and not worry about it. But I suppose, actually, a lot of things pray on your mind when you are young and stuff like that and I think I was very lucky I never let it all get to me. Well, I did try to commit suicide.

**Peter 20(191)**

Paradoxically, it was during a stint in gaol that things began to change for Peter in terms of his (past and future) involvement with SMSW, and his thinking about the future: "I first went to gaol, I think I stopped [SMSW]. When he was released from gaol he "sort of did it on and off a couple of times and stuff like that, here and there" [20(344)]. However, his thinking had developed, partly driven by his time in gaol:

It took a long time for me to learn. I don't know how I really did it. I think it come to a point in my life where I had enough and I think my mind had enough, my body had enough. I think it was time to just get on with my life. I think I made a conscious decision and I think my mind and my whole body just said yeah, this is it.

**Peter 20(231)**

In effect, through age, several stints in gaol, and a maturing ability to think and converse about what was important, a significant reappraisal was beginning to take place for Peter:

It was hard. I still had thoughts about using gear but it was good. I just sort of woke up and started looking for work and things around me. People still get me pissed off but I'd say to myself, "don't worry about it; they are not important in life".

Peter 20(231)

Work was still significant, and a pathway forward, but in creating this pathway forward, Peter was also "looking for ... things around me". While the "things" are physical (like clothes), it also involved people and alternative relationships to those he experienced in his childhood and in sex work:

I think because I want to be something in my life. I just want to be a normal Joe Blow. I just want to have a job. I want to have some money coming in every week. I want to be able to go down the shops, I want to be able to buy things if I want to. I want to be able to buy clothes. I want to go out with friends if I can. I want to be able to meet nice people and the job that I've got: nice people that work there. I get on really well with them and I think it's very hard to find today. I really enjoy their company.

Peter 20(243)

Gaol was the interlocutory vacuum. While in a prison environment devoid of sex work, he was nonetheless imbued with thoughts, and an internal dialogue, that spelt out the dream he had for his future life. He wanted activity, choices and people. It was a new form of work that was sought. The absence of substance use and the fact that, as he put it, "I really enjoy their company", allowed him to make even more significant and definitive decisions:

That [SMSW] is a part of the book I can close. Part of the chapter I can close, I've finished that, I've done that and I think I can leave that behind. I feel even though I did that stuff, I can feel happy with what I did because that was part of my life. That was a part of my life that I did, whether it was good or whether it wasn't good, whether I liked it, I didn't like it. That's a part of my life that happened and that's one chapter I've done and leave it at that.

Peter 20(468)

For some engaged in SMSW, the motivation to leave the scene may be attributed to the abusive relationships they encountered or the substance use in which they engaged and which adversely affected so much of life. For Jack, the decision to leave SMSW was about identity. Jack "did" his "last client early this year" [26(358)] and cited "self respect" [26(362)] as the main reason for ceasing SMSW. For him, the enhancement of self-worth was a key factor in the decision to find alternative pathways in life:

To look at myself and go, I'm worth more than \$100 or I'm worth more, my body and my emotions and all of that, is worth a lot more to somebody else. It's worth a lot more than that to

me, than \$120 to give it to someone else for an hour. You know, especially when they're there and they're gone. It's like there is no sustaining. It's like casual sex. I can't do casual sex 'cause there is nothing in it for me. Like there's nothing there. It doesn't mean anything. So I suppose doing sex work, sort of, like I had that image in my head, yeah, and I suppose I look at myself and I think I'm worth a lot more than that. I deserve more than that.

Jack 26(370)

Apart from the reductionism inherent in placing a \$100 or \$120 value on his life, what was particularly significant for Jack was that SMSW was abhorrent, “especially when they're there and they're gone. It's like there is no sustaining” of any relationship. The need for an alternative pathway arose because of the association between the monetary value placed on him and his burgeoning awareness that self respect must be prized. The need also developed because he became aware that people drifting in and out of his life was no longer what he desired. It failed to sustain life. In contrast to the SMSW encounters, was the relationship between Jack and his partner, where sexual intimacy also played a part, but with defining differences:

Jack: It's different. It's not like sex work at all. I mean I know it's difficult because boundaries and stuff with him doing massage work and having known him as a sex worker in the past. I don't want to think of him like that and I try not to look at him like that but sometimes when he's not around that is the first thing I think of: he's out doing sex work or I can't trust him as far as that goes. But apart from that, sex is fine. My sex life with him is good.

DL: What defines it as being good?

Jack: I don't know actually. It's just, I suppose, him trying to satisfy me and my needs as well, rather than me trying to satisfy someone else all the time. It's like someone is sort of interested in me and what I want, which is good.

Jack 26(405-410)

Notwithstanding the influence of sex work on their relationship, it was also a place where he experienced a different form of relating:

My relationships now revolve more around emotional commitment and sort of goals that we both have in common rather than sex. I mean if you want sex you can get sex anywhere but to have someone there who is emotionally committed to you rather than physically lusting after your body is completely different. I mean it's not an issue, sort of thing. If he doesn't want sex it's no problem; if he wants sex, yeah, fine. No problem but it's not a hassle in any way.

Jack 26(430)

The change of mind about what was important—arising as it does for Jack from an array of relationships—produced a desire to focus on relationships that had the capacity to sustain life. The relationship with his partner provided, not just a change within his thinking about the future,

but also the vehicle for that future. This was also the case for Mark who, although he was single, nonetheless desired an intimate relationship as the pathway forward:

There's more to me than just the sex sort of thing, to me. I want the person to get to know me inside and I want to get to know that person sort of thing. Like I would be happy if it [sex] never happened, like seriously; it doesn't worry me: it's only a pleasure thing. There's too much mental scars that I've got that I'm trying to deal with and maybe one day that can happen but I'm not going to rush it and see the first guy, that sort of thing. I want to be close to that person and it's like a bit a married couple sort of thing, like Christian marriage people, I believe. Like part of me believes in being a Christian sort of thing. Like some Christians never have sex until they're married sort of thing. I'm happy to be like that.

Mark 11(656)

Notwithstanding the trauma, abandonment, abuse, substance use, and violence experienced by many of the participants—Jack and Mark included—an intimate relationship, within a context of multiple driving forces, was viewed as the pathway forward.

Close intimate relationships are not the only chosen pathway forward. Even where estrangement from family was the precipitating factor leading ultimately to involvement in SMSW, age, reflection, and necessity sometimes resurrect the need for protection by family. That is, from the difficulties inherent in homelessness, isolation and poverty, and the temptations that may arise when crises are all pervasive. Some years after beginning work at *The Wall*, and whilst in a phase when he was attempting to break from sex work, Shaun again faced the demands of poverty and homelessness in another city. He was again attracted to resolving the problem by engaging in sex work, “and that's sort of why I went to my parents because I would have needed money. I had nowhere to stay and I would have ended up back there [*The Wall*]” [16(647)].

Dennis remained involved in MSW, but like other participants he made the transition to a private list of clients, thereby avoiding some of the dangers and pitfalls of SMSW. By developing his own place within the diverse spectrum that is MSW, Dennis was able to bring about a degree of physical and psychological integration of MSW events into his life. The pathway forward was not to leave the MSW scene but rather to bring these experiences into the mainstream of his everyday experience. For Dennis, the ultimate aim was to achieve a position where his physical and material needs could be satisfied and his clients would become friends:

I'm at the stage with these guys now where I can ring up and I don't have to do anything, I can just ask them to put money in my bank account, like now, and they'll do that. So I don't have to do it [sex work] all the time. But I sort of do anyway. Like, sometimes I'm sitting at home and I get bored and, like, I've got money and stuff but I just go and do it anyway. Like I ring up one of my clients and say can I come over and stuff like that and we go over and because, like, most of the time we do other stuff as well. Like, I sort of like to make my clients sort of multi-purpose, you know.

**Dennis 2(557)**

Jules, another participant who relied totally on a private list after advertising in the gay press and on the Internet, dabbled in an alternative career path—real estate—but settled for maintaining a private list of sex work clients. During the first of two interviews, he was very clear about the boundary between work and private life:

I turn up and the job goes sweet and some people aren't very good at discerning between my competence as a professional and how much I actually like them as an individual. It causes problems sometimes and it's always really tricky to deal with and it's probably it is one of the hardest issues that I face because people want to, a lot of people just assume that because they want to be mates with me that I want the same thing.

**Jules 18a(192)**

During the second interview, at which his girlfriend was also present, we further explored the distinction between work and private life. While Jane had comments to make about the lack of distinction between work and private life, Jules was also able to explore this and come to a different position to that which he had proffered during the first interview:

Jane's always giving me grief because she reckons I don't have any friends that I haven't slept with. I sort of say it's the best way to get to know somebody. You get it out of the way and then you can progress. Yeah, there is definitely a big chunk of close people are from work and sometimes that bothers me and for the most part I just say, "well, fuck how you met them, that in the scheme of things, what you really have got to ask is what you think of them". If I think they're good people then that's all that matters.

**Jules 18b(195)**

Jules outlined a rationale that was shared by Dennis. MSW was not just about money for a living. They also wanted, within sex work, a connection to people whom they could transition, away from sex work, into being friends as well as supporters. What Jules added to this equation was that his ultimate goal with those he wanted as friends was that the sexual aspect of the contact would disappear. From sex work client to friendship without sex; this was his aim.

While the pathways into SMSW are able to be tracked with some precision, remaining in or leaving SMSW is a more fluid and often less definitive phenomenon. This reality makes the tracking of exit pathways difficult. The desire to leave can be real and compelling, and this much can be understood. However, the ability to envision and create an exit pathway is another matter. It is clear that the desire to remain or leave centres invariably on two pivotal points: the need for money and the quality of the relationships existing within the MSW setting. If there are viable alternatives for financial support, leaving MSW becomes a real option. If the relationships are not “sustaining” of life at a broader level, then leaving becomes an imperative. Indecision is present where an exit pathway is not financially viable and/or where the relationships that are established within this setting are valued, viewed as a source of relationships and, therefore, perceived as indispensable. While there may not be a clear and discernible pathway out of sex work, what is clear is that alternative pathways are sought. A common feature for all of the participants is that where they begin—on the street, in chaotic circumstances, exposed to the night and the wilds of the environment—is not where they wish to, or do, remain. Change is inevitable, and whether he discovers or *crafts a pathway out of SMSW* or whether *he remain* involved in sex work, transitions do occur in the way that sex work occurs and relationships are core to these transitions.

## Conclusion

The *untold stories* contained in the previous chapter allowed for the unfolding of a richly descriptive understanding of the lives of the four young males who engaged in street-based sex work. This chapter focused on the heart of that chapter — the experience of relationships. These many and varied relationships are the primary feature being explored in this work on the lives of males who engage in street-based sex work. Like all of us, these young men are born into relationships, experience their supportive and disruptive elements, and approach and withdraw from them in a dynamic fashion. The relationships they experience defy easy or simplistic

definition or understanding. Embedded within the experience of relationship is the dissonance caused by disconnection, objectification, and degradation. These experiences are formative of the manner in which relationships are lived throughout life. What we see in this chapter is the unfolding and unpredictable complexity, and yet centrality, of relationships. From birth through to leaving home and into adulthood, the movements that are the core of these relationships, whether positive or negative, can be a series of natural transition, or a wrenching experience that leaves the person fragmented and in despair. These core relationships, at home and elsewhere, influence greatly the progress of a person through life. Relationships are writ large in the lives of males engaged in SMSW. There is nothing dull, insignificant or tame about their relational experiences. They are colourful, powerful, ever-present, and the source of their demise and their positive development.

The first of these relationships are the *precursor relationships*. Parents, siblings, peers, school, local community, and strangers; all of these are significant influences on early development. Some of the participants (for example Steph, Richard, and Nathan) recounted stories of parents and siblings that indicated their availability and support, but also detachment from the reality of life as experienced by the participant. These parents and siblings were present and engaged but also found the reality of their children's thinking and experience to be disturbing. This disturbance of connection became palpable and a cause for premature independence within the child who later worked at *The Wall*. It was a rarity to discover parents and siblings who were able to embrace the child who thought differently and who experienced different urges and desires. Jules had parents and siblings who could accept difference within their son and brother. The result for Jules was that his experimentation was thought about and discussed within the safety of family. This made a difference. We discover Dennis between those two polarities. While there was silence within his family and social network about his sexual experimentation, there was sufficient tangible concern and openness to allow him to remain there while he discovered a way to bring his worlds together. He began this process by discussing his

sexual experimentation with a school friend. His mate's acceptance of his bisexuality and his involvement in sex work allowed the cohesive processes in his world to continue. In simple terms, those who were able to incorporate their difference within their broad social support network of origin, were safer, less isolated, and less burdened by internal fragmentation and a pervasive sense of isolation.

Dominic and Jack represent the majority of participants for whom such integrative experiences were unavailable. While their parents cared for them, they did not know or believe that either boy had been abused, at an early age, and while in their care. The lack of awareness and protection shattered both boys, leaving them reeling from the loss of guiding and supportive parents. Fragmentation and despair are at their strongest within such an experience. The young male inevitably responds by searching for alternative relational experiences. For the participants in this study, this meant travelling to the city of Sydney and *engaging the scene* and the people associated with SMSW.

Young, invariably alone, under-skilled, and prematurely separated from those who should be parenting, many of the participants were exposed to people, places and experiences that marked a rapid transformation in their lives. Their arrival in Sydney was defined by homelessness and poverty, and they were required to mount a response. They met new peers, were exposed to new, and sometimes extreme, forms of experimentation. Again, they were required to mount a response. They met adults who nurtured and cared, peers who made positive and negative connections for them, and discovered places that would radically change their lives.

The common feature for all of the participants was that, regardless of the route they travelled, they all ended up at *The Wall*. How this initial event was dealt with, was influenced heavily by a number of factors such as: age, level of despair, level of awareness regarding social processes, their capacity for assessment of others, and a range of accidental factors over which there was no control. Richard was introduced to welfare agencies and this tempered the harshness of his exposure. However, a peer introduced him to *The Wall*, and although this could

be defined absolutely as a negative development, the introduction by a knowing peer meant that his first encounter was relatively positive. At 14, it was a relatively positive outcome from within an absolutely negative transition point. Other transitions to *The Wall* were more haphazard and precarious. Malcolm's first experiences led to him becoming a virtual prisoner of an early "mug". For some, like James, the transition was easier, safer and less traumatic. Again, age plays a major influencing role within this complex social process. The other key, and largely accidental, factor is the set of people encountered in this process of *engaging the scene*.

Once at *The Wall*, the experiences are many and varied, positive and negative, but always formative, and always centred around relational encounters. A key feature of the experience of being at *The Wall* is the initial surprise exhibited by each participant. Without exception, they were unaware of the existence of sex work when they arrived at *The Wall*, and some, like Dennis, were astonished that you could actually earn an income from something in which you were deliberately engaging for the purpose of self-discovery. Again, age is a key factor in how these first experiences transpire. Richard and Malcolm were both 14 when they arrived at *The Wall*. Neither boy had any idea of what was occurring nor did they possess the assessment or relational tools to manage the situation. They were exposed and vulnerable. Dominic was 15 when he was first at *The Wall*, and while still young, had the dubious "advantage" of having "done" sex work away from *The Wall* from age 11. He was far from unknowing when he reached *The Wall*. Steph had a similar story.

While all of the participants experienced some form of potentially hazardous encounter, there were differences in the way that each person responded. Prior relational experiences, age at exposure, capacity for thinking and assessing, awareness of worldly realities, first encounters, social support, and level of despair; all of these were key components of whether *relating within the MSW scene* was relatively positive or absolutely negative. Encounters at *The Wall* are dominated by several features such as: a power imbalance, conflicting desires, physical exposure, substance use, betrayal among peers, violence, criminality, and camaraderie. How these variable and

unpredictable experiences are managed depends, in part, on the young male's experience of nurturance, how he *relates to self*, and the level of *dissonance* created by his experience at *The Wall*.

Images of self are contextual. They emerge, over time, within a context that is peopled by family and friends, adults in schools, and the myriad characters then enter and exit our daily existence. For those who have worked at *The Wall*, their formative years have been crisscrossed by a greater number of uncensored encounters. The intentions of those who enter the lives of these young males at *The Wall* are rarely or singularly other-centred. They *want*, and they pay to have their *wants* fulfilled. This singular intention impacts on the way that each of the participants experiences self. For Allan, Shaun, and Dominic, these demands fly in the face of their prior, but still developing, understanding of self. It is a clash of expectations that produces a dissonance of identity. Self-understood as heterosexual, they experience the client's desire for receptive oral sex or penetrative anal sex as anathema. A dramatic shift in self understanding is one of the consequences of this experience. There is an unresolvable crisis of identity that emerges from even the single act that produces a physiological reaction. Arousal and ejaculation are the physical manifestations that conjure up regret, shame, confusion, and silence. What was clear about identity is now murky and troublesome.

For Drake, Adam, Dennis, and Germaine (among others), a prior awareness of bisexuality or homosexuality is a critical element in how the sex work experience is framed. Where the events contain a level of personal experimentation within the larger frame of sex work, the personal element appears to alleviate some of the negative aspects of the commercial task. Greater clarity is present in the assessment process and in the encounter. A homosexual sexual identity impacts on, and positively modifies, dissonance.

Substance use is a critical and defining element in the personal story and sex work experience of each of the participants. They either manage the occasional use of substances (as occurred with Jules, Aydin and Jason) or substance use controls their existence because of its use in managing unpalatable experiences and emotions. It is a defining part of the sex work

phenomenon. Where it is unregulated, life is generally chaotic and every effort at gaining stability is thwarted by the need for drugs. Where this chaos is sustained, the internal dialogues about self and others become unrelentingly persecutory.

The sense of self that emerges from the haze of substance use is confused, self-deprecating and riddled with despair. Its use creates an experience that is beyond dissonance; it is dangerous and life-threatening. It impacts, not just on the sense of self, but also on the capacity to relate to self and others with safety. This occurs in two ways. Where substance use is present, clear and safe decisions are less likely to occur. Despite his clear position on safe sex, when Cory celebrates at New Year, and substances are involved, he makes unsafe decisions and the potential for harm is evident. Where substance use is present, its ongoing or chronic use creates a depressive milieu, and survival and flourishing is compromised. *Relating to sexual safety* at either of these moments is problematic.

What is also problematic from the moment that substance use and identity dissonance are present, is the ability to seek out a future. *Pathways out of SMSW* are difficult to achieve. Some, like James and Raymond, choose PMSW as their pathway forward. Others, like Aydin and Richard, use education as the leverage point that creates a pathway. They leave, get educated and never return. Peter needed a stint in gaol to create his pathway forward. Brian chose a rehab program as his point of leverage. Regardless of the tool that is used, most of the participants thought about alternative pathways forward with only a few wishing, or needing, to remain in MSW. In every case, and whether remaining in MSW or leaving, people were an important part of the process.

What is striking about SMSW is that it is riddled with relationships — before, during, and after the MSW experience. Relationships are the key template for understanding SMSW because they dominate the thinking and the experience of the person within the phenomenon. While common sense would indicate the demise of a young male involved in SMSW, the participants in this study endure hardship but keep moving and struggling. They seek other, and

better, relationships. There is a resilient quality to each of these untold stories, and it is located in and around their relationships. Be they positive or negative, or a mercurial combination of both, relationships are the crucible for survival, change, and development.

Positive development occurs, for each young male, because he seeks and cultivates relationships that are a foil to the other more destructive encounters that occur in his life. He seeks people and environments that open up different and more positive vistas. It is to one such facilitating environment, and one such set of relationships—the *education system and educationalists*—that I now turn because, where this system—of people, structure and knowledge—works in a positive fashion, it can be the relational environment that enables survival and progress to flourish.

## Chapter 6

### EDUCATION IN THE LIVES OF MALES ENGAGED IN STREET-BASED SEX WORK

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#### Introduction

We can presume that for every participant, formal education has played some role at some stage in his life. A cursory examination of Table 1 indicates that participation in education was problematic, at least for some. While all of the participants completed their primary education, only seven participants completed their secondary schooling and only three completed any form of university or college degree. Two related and perennial questions face educationalists, allied health clinicians and policy makers alike. Why do young people drop out of the school system? How do educationalists and the education system deal with the personal, environmental and systemic difficulties faced by young people who are marginalised within such a profoundly significant life experience? This chapter explores these two questions through the lens provided by research into the experience of males who engage in street based sex work or prostitution. It explores the positive and negative experiences encountered by the participants throughout their education. Six major themes emerge.

It is not surprising that education arises as a major theme in the lives of young males engaged in SMSW. Education is inextricably connected to social and personal identity formation. As this chapter shows, even in the most marginalised of social situations—and engagement in male sex work presents as such—the centrality of education is evident in the formation of the participants. To begin, it can be a *protective experience*.

### **A protective experience**

As Resnick (1997) and others (Quane & Rankin, 2006) indicate, education can be a protective experience. In the face of adversity (e.g., in the family), education—through structure, process, content and people—can help the person to mount adaptive responses that build resilience. Schools have an ability to therapeutically contain and protect. It is an experience and an environment where respite and release may be found from the chaos of life outside the school. In part, this occurs within the educational experience because involvement with school can exclude other experiences and behaviours. For Jeffrey (23), who was long out of school and for whom life was a very disturbing experience, the protective qualities of the educational experience were acknowledged:

If you're a 15 year old, going to school and stuff, I mean, you don't really, unless you actually know other kids that are involved in it, you don't really see things like working the street, drugs, etc, you know. It's not until you're 16, 17 or even 18 that peers introduce you to this sort of thing. You know, when you're 9, 10, and 11, yeah, 9 to 12, between the ages of 9 and 12 is usually a time for exploring and curiosity killed the cat sort of thing.

**Jeffrey 7(380)**

Both Jeffrey and Malcolm exemplified the notion that when you fall through the structured net of school, it can precipitate the collapse of an entire fragile support structure:

Just disagreements with my mother. Troubles at school. I was a bit of a problem child back then. Thrown out of school in Year 7. Mum didn't take that too well. We had an argument, I left. Came in here [inner city].

**Malcolm 3(55)**

The demise of schooling can be the last straw in terms of psychosocial stability. Other relationships, already stressed by a variety of personal and environmental factors, are often fractured when the significant and binding structure of education falls apart. The family doesn't cope and neither does the child. Any collapse is complicated, chaotic and necessarily interwoven with other life events. It can also be sequential as it was for Damien:

Well, for a couple of years I was, you know, going to school and, you know, having my own flats and, you know, keeping up all right. I think a few things happened. I think I got kicked out of the school I was at. And then, I must have broken up with my girlfriend or something. Then I got kicked out of the place I was living and just, um, I don't know, sunk into depression or, yeah, you know, just stopped really kind of caring for a little while.

**Damien 4(388)**

Expulsion from school was one experience from which recovery was possible. However, coupled with other more personal experiences such as relational breakdown, homelessness and finally depression, education had little hope of surviving.

For others who are financially advantaged, getting out of a bad school situation into a more supportive educational environment can make a difference to the broad educational experience and enhance the protective qualities of education. Adam "went to a private school ... out at Hazelbrook and became a really upper class snob who had absolutely no money. You know champagne with beer pockets". He "spent '96, '97 and '98 there" [14(67)]. Although financial issues remained an issue, he was able to remain at school while family connections were dissolving. In effect, moving from a negative school experience effectively retrieved him from an early, overwhelming and debilitating experience of homelessness and wandering. This was particularly significant, since by 15, Adam was already beginning to wander towards the city and its red light district:

Adam: No, I'd left Nepean and just going nowhere.

DL: Right. So there was a period where around 15, where there was no school?

Adam: Yeah, probably towards like towards the end of third term I left and didn't go all of fourth term. And then my grandfather died at the end of December 1995 and subsequently, having gone to the funeral, and then reconnecting with my family and thus discovering once the will had been read and that he had set aside this [money] for me to go and do this [attend a private school].

For Adam, who completed “one semester of university” [14(71)], the opportunity to spend the last of his high school years at a private college was an opportunity that allowed him, in concert with his family, to avoid an early exit from school. At least for some time, it provided him with a structured and reliable chance at developing a future without being totally distracted or consumed by the other thoughts and desires that were beginning to emerge for him.

Where education exists, it can protect. The loss of or removal from education—often caused by, or co-existent with, a chaotic life—marks the demise of opportunity. Where education is present, it helps to bring about guidance for the future. As will be seen through the next emergent theme, the experience of education is not just about attendance at an event extending over many years. The educational experience is rich with events, content, processes and people, all of which have the capacity to act as a *reference point and guide*.

### Reference point and guide

Drake exemplified the capacity within students to take the raw material that is the broad educational experience environment and—in concert with the people, place, processes and content—give it ongoing significance and meaning. As such, the educational experience became a reference point and a guide for Drake:

You’ll probably see me refer to my younger years, as we go on, by my schooling. And to me, my school years and the places that I was, and how I lived and whatever, is primarily my, I don’t know what terms to use. I guess it’s primarily my foundation to my memories.

Drake 6(72)

There was an intense level of chaos for Drake within his family, created mainly by the presence of a step-father who repeatedly sexually abused him. School became central to his life, not simply as an escape from a negative environment. It was, as he puts it, the “foundation to my memories”. In the absence of other foundation points, this proactive and deliberate strategy

elevated school to a position of influence beyond learning. It was a logical and adaptive response to an experience of adversity over which he had little control:

Like some people say, I remember when my mother was a certain age, or I remember when I lived in a certain place, this and this happened. It was more, I remember when I was at this school, or I remember when I knew this person. I remember when I felt this. It was during my time at such and such place or with so and so person. So I guess, rather than having things that are related to my close family, my immediate family and my close friends during my adolescence, I guess I refer to a lot of things that happen in my life to an external source.

**Drake 6(72)**

Education was a significant “source” of positive input. It was “external” to his family. It expanded his horizon “because every discovery that changed my life, every new ideal, and every new concept I came across, was always through school” [6(72)]. The newness of the experience was life altering for him as “school was always the place where I had big changes in my life; where I’ve made big discoveries about myself” [6(172)]. Drake was clearly aware of the need to be suspicious of those around him. Young people who experience sexual abuse are often vigilant in respect of adults and foreign environments. This made Drake’s strategy to impute trust to an external source even more significant. It was educational experiences, and the relationships that were embedded within the structured environment, that carried the positive impact of education.

The experience of dissonance and disconnection within his family created the environment where searching for alternatives became a priority and an imperative if survival was to be ensured:

Mum and dad and my sister were so different to what I was, not just in the way I thought or the way I behaved. But as people, we were far apart, as opposite as two people or a group of people could possibly be. And, and, the one thing that I distinctly recall the most, feeling throughout my childhood and adolescence, and this goes even back as far as when I was in South America, was that I felt like a stranger to my immediate family: very much so, in so many ways and on so many different levels.

**Drake 6(72)**

Drake’s sense that he was a “stranger to [his] immediate family” and “on so many different levels” produced urgency within him. This urgency was about the search for alternative sources of intellectual nourishment that had a power and influence beyond the intellectual level. It became a reference point and guide for him within his social ecology and helped to provide a

sense of coherence for him (Marsh et al., 2007). Even though this alternative environment was usually a large and rambling system, it nonetheless became the place where Drake discovered important things about his world and himself. It was his interaction with this “external source”—decisions he made, people he encountered, ideas and concepts to which he was exposed—that created stability in what was a difficult emotional and physical environment.

While the quality of care received from parental figures (Coulling, 2000) and the support of a community (Gibson, 2005) are among the most significant factors in any successful engagement with school, the social environment of the school is also highly significant (Levinson & Sparkes, 2005). Children who experience racial and sexual marginalisation continue to be at risk of absenteeism, total withdrawal and violence (Davis, 2006; Rivers, 2000; Wyss, 2004). A number of risk-reducing factors can make a difference. These include the person’s educational ability, his capacity to engage with the educational space, and his interest in the content of education (Lamb, Dwyer, & Wyn, 2000). These factors assist with school retention. The “external source” can fail without such a broad-based level of engagement.

Research indicates that sexual minority children often suffer discrimination and violence within the school setting (Hillier et al., 2005; Mudrey-Camino & Adams, 2006). And yet, for Drake, his ability and his enjoyment of the education process were crucial to his survival within and outside the school environment: “One of the reasons was because I was, I guess, academically very astute. And I enjoyed reading and I enjoyed history and I enjoyed math and I enjoyed English” [6(80)]. While he was a “stranger” at home, this was not the case for Drake in school. Within that environment, he discovered educational resources to which he became attached and into which he immersed himself. Books were a “huge part of [his] schooling” [6(88)]. They introduced him to a world of imagination and discovery. However, the value in building resilience was not simply with objects such as books, or content such as English. School in its totality contributed to the experience of protection. It “was almost like a zone, like a different place: It was a world to me. I always look forward to going to school” [6(92)]. Drake’s

survival was made more likely because of the school environment and the books. They became his reference point and guide.

While the books, subject matter, and environment were a particular focus of attention at school, people were also within his gaze, and of significance, and they were generally older than himself:

Even when I was younger, I was always hanging around older people, and not just older adults, but older adult kids as well. Like when I was in Year 7 and 8, I was always hanging around Year 12s and Year 11s and Year 10s.

**Drake 6(92)**

He was “always looking forward to the people that [he] would see at school” [6(100)]. Peers were important, but there were other relational elements to the school experience that maximised his capacity for adaptation and hence resilience. Teachers filled memorable roles:

And then there were people like Mr Jones the music teacher. He was fantastic. He had a way about him I guess. He was a very large man and had this very aristocratic accent, very English bloke, had these amazing eyebrows I remember that were very thick and bushy, and then sort of spun off with these two huge big spikes at the ends that hung away from his face and outwards. And he almost looked beastish [sic] but he was such a loud fellow and very much in control of his class; and he knew so much as well.

**Drake 6(108)**

While personality and control were significant factors in this experience with his teacher, what also made it a positive educational encounter was the content (knowledge) and process (pedagogy) within the educational encounter with Mr Jones:

Whenever he'd teach, I remember he'd take us on journeys all the time, and he'd tell us about an instrument and how it was created and he'd tell us stories about famous musicians that had used it or made themselves famous using that instrument. He had the ability to give you a real feeling and a real essence.

**Drake 6(108)**

People other than teachers in the school also hold sway over thinking and stability. If the educational experience is a positive one, they also contribute to the security and the stability that inclusion in the educational process can produce. For Drake, this protective quality was manifest in the school counsellor:

Sister Jane was another big figure in my life. She was the school counsellor. And she played I guess, in a way, she's not someone that I think about a great deal, or have thought about a great

deal, but she played a very important role in my two years at De La Salle College and she was incredible. She's like a figure to me of not just like a friend sort of thing; she was more than just a counsellor to me and I saw her as more than that. She was a nun and a very, sort of, ethically sound and fundamental person, you know, who was sixty something years old, and very old and set in her ways. But she was progressive I guess in her thinking, and she presented me with a lot of new ideas and concepts and new ways to deal with things and ideas: a whole lot of other things.

**Drake 6(108)**

Drake was exposed to “new ideas and concepts” that assisted him in gaining perspective and clarity about his life experience away from the school. Significantly, this occurred in relation to the sexual abuse he experienced over a lengthy period of his childhood and early adolescence. However, prior to the ideas and concepts, there was the “figure” that she was to him. More than a counsellor, she embodied ethics, the “fundamentals” for understanding life, and longevity, all of which added to his experience of feeling contained and safe. Within that context, he was able to consider, and engage with, the harsh realities of his daily life.

One way of coping for Drake was to quarantine his experience away from immediate access. Blocking was a strategy employed by him. Reframing the experience was also a critical strategy:

I dealt with it that way because I just blocked. I just said to myself, OK, he's not my father; he is the man that is married to my mother. He's not biologically my father. The first time that he did actually sexual, have sex with me; it was penetrative. So this first instance of abuse was penetrative. So, it was painful as well. So, you know, and I just bit my pillow, and, prayed and hoped that it would be over shortly, and just shut my eyes, and I basically, like, almost went to sleep. If nothing else, you know, and I dealt with it that way all the way through it.

**Drake 6(300)**

The person of Sister Jane, with all of the characteristics that made her significant—age, stability, thinking, ideas, space, and time—all combined to make it possible for Drake to explore this most personal and painful of experiences:

When I first spoke to Sister Jane about it, it was the first time that I acknowledged that it was actually painful; 'cause up until that point, I'd simply dealt with it by saying to myself: it's not happening or it's just, it's just like it's normal.

**Drake 6(308)**

This was also the case with Nick, who also discovered new ideas and concepts about his life through his conversation with his counsellor. It was an experience that could not be achieved, for either boy, within the home environment:

Then at the age of 14, I finally got told by the school counsellor what's right and what is wrong and when she was saying what was wrong I was like, hey, that's happened to me before. So I decided I would go home and tell Mum.

Nick 23(539)

Making sense of life experience and gaining access to thinking that acts as a *reference point and guide* comes about through a strategy employed by some marginalised males within the education system. The strategy is to find trusted people within a trusted and safe environment, allow the experience within the environment to sustain, and then explore the confusing elements of life within that sustaining, trusted and safe context. Notwithstanding the constructive and supportive nature inherent in the educational encounter, *alienation* is also experienced by many males who engage in SMSW.

## **Alienation**

For children and young people on the margins of society, participation in school is a tentative and tenuous experience (Beautrais, 2003; Hillier et al., 1998; Hillier & Harrison, 2004; Hillier, Matthews, & Dempsey, 1997; Hillier et al., 2005; Lisak & Luster, 1994; Plummer, 1999). It can easily be rocked by any number of factors beyond the control of the student. Absence from school is, of its nature, an alienating experience that is formative. Dominic (22) experienced “rape” at seven years of age [22(151-163)] and began prostitution away from the inner city when he was “11 or 12” [22(147)]. He left school at “the start of year eight” [age 13] [22(147)]. Even while experiencing such turmoil and devastation, he reported that he’d learnt more since leaving school than while there: “more about real life. It’s a sad world, mate. I’m looking forward to dying, the way the world’s going.” [22(735)]. A great deal of what Dominic experienced generally was alienating and this flowed into and contaminated the educational experience:

DL: Do you remember why it was that you decided to leave home?

Dominic: Yeah, because I was fighting with my mum and she told me to pack my bags and go, so I did.

DL: Do you remember what the fight was over?

Dominic: No, I don't know, something, wagging school or something. You know, just something little kids do.

DL: So school wasn't big on the agenda?

Dominic: No, I hated school, aye.

DL: Why did you hate school?

Dominic: Just hated it. It was good seeing my mates every day but I hated it. It was putrid.

**Dominic 22(104-119)**

Notwithstanding the presence of friends, school was “putrid” and “hated”, even during his primary school years. School resistance or “wagging” was Dominic’s strategy for dealing with this “putrid” experience. However, absenting himself also had consequences — alienation from the education experience, isolation from “mates”, *and* expulsion from home.

Peter retains strong memories of the violence he experienced within the family home. He never knew his father, but “I met a lot of mum’s boyfriends, they were very violent” [20(87)]. This impacted on every aspect of his life. However, school itself was also an alienating experience, tainted by bullying, abuse, ridicule, and the experience of neglect, all of which created a milieu of meaninglessness:

It's not just in the family; it's other things. Teenagers get hassled at school, you know, the pressure of school, people calling them fat, or dumb or whatever, just because they've got a different way they look or the way they dress or make up they put on or whatever. There's always going to be people there that are going to hassle you, no matter what.

**Peter 20(203)**

Whereas for Drake school was his place of retreat and support, Peter experienced a level of alienation that served only to intensify the sense of anxiety and alienation he experienced within his home. Both were places from which it was easy to run, and while running is one response to the chaos to which Peter was exposed at school, there were other emotional reactions and responses he had to mount in order to survive:

Like okay, someone calls you a poofter or someone calls you a faggot or whatever, you know, someone's teasing you or heaps of people are always picking on you at school or you've got problems yourself, personal problems like you're young, you've got nowhere to live, you've got

no friends, you've got no family, no one there to love you, no one there to say it's right, to cry, nothing like that. I had to be strong; I had to learn to be nasty. I had to learn you know, and these were good things, not good things, but these were things I had to learn and I found it so hard to cope with things around me, people. Someone would say something and I'd react and bash them or belt them or something like that. I was very quick to react.

**Peter 20(231)**

It is not possible to attribute an absolute and direct causal connection between the violence he experienced at home, the bullying and isolation he experienced at school and the aberrant and sometimes violent responses he mounted while living on the street. That said, had home and school been more psychologically and physically supportive environments, Peter's life—which included long periods in gaol for physical assault—may have been different.

Dennis was already drifting—in an exploratory, pre-sex work sense—to the inner city: lured by lights, excitement and difference that soon translated into sex work:

It just seemed like a sort of cool place to be and that, you know ... 24-hour poker machines and stuff like that as well, that I could play and stuff, and then like when the money ran out that's when I started sort of looking for other ways to get it but I didn't originally come in like for that reason.

**Dennis 2(99)**

While his involvement with school was diminishing, the turning point was when his school “closed down” when he “was in Year 9 and that's when I left school” [2(67)]. When his *chosen* rather than *given* social environment began to be emotionally and physically more tantalising and more interesting than his mainstream activities, flaws within mainstream structures became an easily grasped reason to invest energy elsewhere. The loss of stability within a key structure consolidated his involvement in the city. It was a rapid progression to involvement in sex work. This was the same with Leyton who “was always attracted to” the inner city: “Like, when I used to jig school and stuff, [be]cause I'm from Campbelltown, but um, there was some shit going on at home and I just didn't want to be a part of it, so I just took off out of there and come straight up here” [27(31)]. The combination of the tantalising bright lights against a background where he was alienated from school and home meant that these potentially engaging and containing environments had little hope of survival. For both Dennis and Leyton, this move was

consolidated because, as Leyton frames it, “I liked it because I had unlimited freedom, and 14 year olds, you know, crave freedom” [27(31)].

Not all experiences of school and of education are as positive as those discussed in the previous emergent theme, and not all leaving-school experiences are related to school closures. Malcolm was very alone at school, partly out of desire but also partly because of his perception that he was unable to relate and socialise:

Like I'd rather just go sit by myself. Even at school when I done my HSC there was like a group that I didn't speak to and then like a group of people I did speak to and the rest of the school I just ignored, like they weren't there. Like they'd talk to me and I'd just ignore them because I don't know how to talk to them properly.

**Malcolm 3(419)**

While the school environment did not appear actively to work against stability, Malcolm was not able to feel confident or able to socialise within what, for him, was a demanding environment. Brian simply did not want to be there and did not wish to be a part of the “popular crowd” at school:

No. To the end of school actually I had the opportunity a few times to get in with the popular crowd but I just left school 'cause I wanted to get out of there. I didn't, I don't know, I didn't care for doing Year 11 and 12 but I wish I had stayed now.

**Brian 12b(371)**

It was alienating and uncomfortable and a place both boys would rather not be. However, it remained a place of significance when they thought about their past and their future, an issue that will be dealt with later in this chapter.

Brian's discomfort was in not feeling a sense of belonging and connection with his peers. This was, in part, because of his sense of being different. However, as with Peter's experience, more active and negative psychosocial dynamics were operating within the school environment. Bullying was one manifestation of these active and negative psychosocial dynamics. While living with his family, Jeffrey “always used to get picked on and stuff and [he] never really had the peer support that [he] needed”. Like Malcolm, “That in itself made [him] a bit of a hermit” [7(480)].

Malcolm and Brian were isolated as they kept their distance from peers in a pre-emptive avoidance of difficulty. Jeffrey was isolated in his attempts at avoiding bullying. Nathan, realising that he was different, was ostracised within a country school after he returned from a period at a city school where he experienced greater diversity within the school population:

Then when I hit back at West Cowra, I didn't change and people thought of me, thought I'd be still that shy guy that they knew before, but I wasn't. Nowhere near that. I think I even camped it up even more really because I was just getting ... the minute I got back there I was getting called poofter and faggot and all that.

**Nathan 21(177)**

There is a critical connection between hegemonic thinking around masculinity and identity, the social environment, difference and bullying. Nathan moved, with his family, to the Australian capital, as a result of his father's change in employment. The change of environment brought with it a more fundamental shift in Nathan's thinking about self. Nathan was exposed to a new academic and social hegemony: a liberal education, and a non-traditional pedagogy involving a more Socratic methodology. Difference was encouraged, and in fact supported. However, this new way of being—the exploration of other aspects of self and of world—was threatened outside the new environment that supported the change in thinking. Nathan returned to a small country town, again because of a change of family circumstances. He suffered the consequences of being different and of thinking differently.

Homophobic vilification, an all too common experience within educational settings, progressed to bullying and physical assaults:

I got poofter and faggot and all that thing, like every day. But I'm not exaggerating that that happened. That happened every day of my two years back in West Cowra in high school. Then it got to the stage where I was getting fruit and tennis balls and rocks thrown at me as I walked through different quadrangles and things like that.

**Nathan 21(289)**

The institution struggled to understand Nathan and so he received little support. The hegemony of the small country school was protected by teachers and students alike. Whether with malicious intent or not, the foreigner and the stranger was ignored, dismissed or repelled:

Teachers — I had no real support from teachers whatsoever. I remember there was a couple of incidents where the PE teacher asked his year who they thought in the school was gay and I was pretty pissed off with that. That was when Mum had got sick first and so I had no back up because I needed parental support and that and nothing happened there. Like I'd be walking through the quadrangle and would be getting all this like verbal abuse and I went up to one teacher and went, "What the fuck are you going to do about that?" He just went, "Nathan, there's no need to swear." I went, "Oh, fuck you!"

**Nathan 21(289)**

Participation within education is impacted upon by such negative thinking and behaviour. Some young people leave school because of vilification and assaults. Others struggle within the alienating structure and experience. They internalise the experience and attempt to remain at school. For Nathan, "most of the time, [he'd] just keep on walking and just really try and not let it get to [him] but really it was just kind of eating away ... on the inside" [21(289)]. While the strategy of internalisation helped Nathan cope, it did not remove the experience nor relieve him of the consequences. The experience "Taught [him] how to really hate, [be]cause that happened almost every day [he] was in public" [21(181)].

Notwithstanding the external pain and internal angst that accompanied this level of isolation and active rejection, there was wonderment about such extreme abuse and torment at the hands of other pupils. That said, what was even more surprising and depressing for Nathan was his experience of systemic neglect within the education system. For some, this wonderment turns to a search for understanding about why victimisation occurred within the education system. As Brian indicated, "I think I was a scapegoat, or something, for a lot of the kids' problems that were happening at home or something, you know" [12a(111)]. Within the context of searching for answers, it was clear such antagonistic behaviour and social neglect had a lasting impact on the person:

I have no idea why they picked on me in particular. I'm over it now but you know, like I suppose it really did for a long time play, just you know, I had real issues with it and stuff and because other people didn't like me, I didn't like myself but I'm quite over that now. Thank God. School kids can be so mean.

**Brian 12b(367)**

The denial of difference and the acting out of a fear of difference are about more than isolated events. Such experiences coalesce into a body of experience that is formative in the negative.

Essentially, what is impacted upon is the person's sense of self and place within the world. An inability to *like* and appreciate the self makes relating to others problematic. Of course, the outcome for the person can radically shift when difference is appreciated somewhere within the education system. In the first place, this can occur either because of the sensitivity of teachers and counsellors (as with Drake and Nathan). However, it can also occur when, because of a radical turn, the school becomes aware of, and comprehends, the magnitude of the problem of abuse based on difference. When this awareness and sensitivity is present, it is more likely to be the case that friendships develop and support is received. This does not rule out the possibility that *silence* can also accompany the experience of *friendship* and support.

### Friendship and silence

Schools provide connections. They can be the place where a circle of friendship can emerge, another key factor in the development of resilient responses in the face of adversity. When the structure works well, resulting in protection and support, it is a place where content and camaraderie produce positive effects. For Dennis, and long after he had left school, there is the significant memory of a friendship developed within the educational environment:

This one guy, Simon, that like I used to go to school with him and I used to surf with him and that and we are really good friends, all through high school and primary school. Sort of when I started doing it [gay sex and sex work] I didn't see him like until about a year and a half ago like from when I left school and so it is sort of heaps good and that being back with him. Like it's just like it used to be. Like he has still got all the same friends and stuff so I've sort of like crept back in to that circle of friends and it's really good. Like they're all sort of grown up and older and doing their own stuff and that and like most of them have probably got secrets as well, you know. So that's all right.

Dennis 2(167)

The memory was retained as a focus of attention and recall. It was an experience to which Dennis wished to return. He achieved that end, almost by stealth ("crept back"), and his return to that "circle of friends" was a gratifying experience. History and longevity are important here. The ongoing connection to the past was an experience that produced stability and a sense of pleasure

and contentment. Dennis knew he had a “secret” (his sexual identity and his sex work). However, his return was made easier because he realised, or at least assumed, that all of his friends had secrets. During an absence of some five years, he has retained the need and desire for connections established within school. While there were differences in the way he and Simon developed, what bound them in friendship was the connection and affiliations first established in school.

There remained a separation of which Dennis was aware and about which careful management was required. Although Simon,

... knows that I see guys and that, but I don't think he thinks I do it for money but like even still it's way, way easier to sort of talk to him about it [sex with men] and that. Like he has a laugh you know sometimes.

**Dennis 2(171)**

While Simon had always been in his mind as a reference point, he became a much more important character because of the tentative, and yet, exploratory conversations. The secret of sex work was initially retained as private. There came a point, however, where further exploration turned to a gradual disclosure where initially, “[Dennis] was only joking with him” but Simon “handled it so well that [he] thought [he] would take this opportunity to, you know, do it [discuss it] properly” [2(530-539)]. It was a significant moment:

It was heaps good, man: like I was heaps happy then. I thought, you know, it's really good. Like he didn't even care, it wasn't a big deal for him and stuff.

**Dennis 2(541)**

The world that he had hidden for years gradually unfolded in a way, and in a place, that produced satisfaction and happiness. His comfort increased because there was a continued and gradual unfolding with a long treasured friend.

The relationship developed to the point where banter was an essential element of the exploration process on both sides. On one occasion, Simon rang Dennis while he was with a client. He attempted to cover himself by saying that “I'm at my girlfriend's place ... at Neutral Bay” but Simon “goes, ‘Oh, not likely!’ like that, and sort of had a laugh and stuff”. A momentary

strategy of subterfuge turned into a moment of shared understanding and humour. As Dennis concluded about this moment: “So he’s heaps cool” [2(542-545)].

The understanding arising out of banter, although never fully explored, is nonetheless real. The joy he experienced at these developments, begun as they were in school, impacted positively on Dennis. The friendship gained greater stability and depth because of the unfolding that was accompanied by acceptance. The value of this acceptance was greater because the disclosure was located within a relationship of historical depth. It was the experience of openness, depth and exploration within the context of relational longevity that was of import. This development had poignancy for Dennis because the acceptance came against a background realisation of his difference, and a realisation that this separated him from people. Silence as a strategy was employed because, as he indicated, “it’s probably the sense that I’m different, you know ... they only know, sort of know, what I tell them” [2(549)].

The relationship with Simon—developed through his earliest school years and formed within the educational context—received ongoing attention and effort for a number of important reasons. It was a relationship of historical depth. There had long been an emotional connection combined with shared interests. Simon was able to respond to the initial and ongoing disclosures by Dennis. This intensified the depth within the relationship. There was playfulness and acceptance around the issues of greatest sensitivity. When it works, the school experience is rich with foundational relational experiences. It is a fulcrum of resilience.

The experience of education, where the person is emotionally and intellectually available, can be rich and rewarding and a place where knowledge is gained. It is also a place where young people begin to discover and explore the meaning of relationships. A normal expectation for adolescents—the discovery of relationships—is made more challenging when there is an awareness of difference. Adam identified as “homosexual” from about 12 or 13. It became challenging for him at “about 14, 15 when a whole lot of kids starting getting girlfriends and you know, Year 7, Year 8, you know: around that sort of period of time” [14(300-314)]. An

emotional and social dissonance can arise when you observe what your peers are doing in and around school, and discover that you desire something completely different. This is the beginning of school being an experience contaminated by dissonance, and therefore an isolating experience.

This awakening can be even more problematic if it is accompanied by early or premature sexual experiences that are regarded as abusive:

I mean, it was something that had never really happened to me before, you know. And you know growing up in the area I did, full of homophobic people, you grow up with the kind of stigma attached to, you know, homosexuality; that it's bad or dirty or something. I mean, you hear people talk about it when you're growing up at school and stuff, but when it's actually happening, it's really strange. Yeah, I guess, as well, being like my first sexual experience, it just felt wrong.

**Damien 4(139)**

The discovery of self—already problematised because of negative school and social responses—is further contaminated by the experience of abuse. For Damien, acceptance of self as different was reduced and silenced. However, within that silence there was still a searching for friendship and connections that matter. People are cautiously sought after as intimate friends, initially at a distance. For Drake, it was emotional and thoughtful but mainly observational:

He was just, brown spiky hair, freckles, tiny freckles, very sort of light olive skin, beautiful blue eyes, nice physique: big shoulders. I remember forever that V, the wedge; the first time I saw the wedge. He was, just this V-shape of his back. And he just looked; he was just beautiful, just absolutely beautiful. And, and he smiled at me when I first walked in, and I just, it just felt like I was just blubber; putty in his hands. I mean, this is how I felt.

**Drake 6(156)**

While the desire was held at a distance, it was nonetheless powerful. When a connection beyond observation occurred, the emotional impact was instantaneous. When it moved to the stage of greater connection and intimacy, it was a very private experience often hidden from world view:

He was only about 2 metres away from me. And he just like made his way to me and put his hand on my shoulder and he just leaned in and he kissed me. Just like that. I don't know how he knew or if he knew that he knew, or if I put out something. I don't know anything except that he kissed me and I fell so deep and so fast in love it was crazy. I didn't think about anything but him. And that was our first sexual encounter, and that was oral, and for at least half an hour, we went for gold.

**Drake 6(204)**

With Adam, the experience was also initially observational. A slight boy of 15, he was initially attracted to a classmate's physique. He was tall, "fairly well built", "played rugby for the

school”, was “gentle and kind”, but also “rough and tumble” [14(175)]. His other school mates only found out about this intimate friendship “purely by accident and it didn’t happen until the night of our Year 12 formal” [14(179)]. These were sought after relationships. They were explored initially through furtive glances and by chance and accidental encounters. A level of mateship developed.

For Adam, closeness and practical support became of profound significance. By Year 11, he was homeless but his boyfriend Josh, who lived with his “parents, had a granny flat out the back of his place and by that stage, because [he] wasn’t living at home any more, [Adam] moved into the granny flat and it was just [Adam and Josh] in the granny flat. You know, just mates. So nobody thought anything of it” [14(207)]. Through school, a friendship developed. It provided support, camaraderie, a sense of inclusion and, most significantly—when homelessness became an issue with the potential to disrupt stability and direction—the friendship was a pathway forward and a protector against instability. It was here, where common experiences and common goals were forged, that intimacy happened for Adam. In the granny flat, and alone with each other, they were “sitting up one night and he just put his arm around me laying in bed and one thing sort of just led to another and bingo, there we are” [14(207)].

Adam was in a precarious position. He had feelings for Josh but he also had a great need for stability, about which he had to exercise vigilance. While Adam may have wished for intimacy with Josh, “it was something that [he] was just too timid to initiate because [he] didn’t want to ruin what [he] had” [14(215)]. As he indicated, what was present for Adam in his relationship with Josh was a “good rock solid friendship ... and [he] didn’t want to lose that” [14(219)] because, “there was only one Josh around at that stage. Like he was the only one [Adam] seemed to fully connect with well enough” [14(223)].

For Adam, and in order to avoid disaster, a key strategy was to contain his feelings. He had to maintain them as silent unless permission was clearly given by Josh to the contrary.

Permission was given. Josh made the intimate move, and his action provided a level of safety and security in an otherwise precarious situation.

While silence was imperative until permission was given, once that barrier had been broken, another form of privacy had to be maintained. Adam and Josh,

... kept it under wraps for a long time. It was, I think, we were both scared of what kids would say and do because they can be so vilifying and that. When you're a little kid you always pick on something that's odd or different and you just run it into the ground until it can't get up any more.

Adam 14(183)

The enclave of secrecy was created by, and essential for, Adam and Josh if they were to survive. Silence was imperative because there was recognition that, although school was the source from which they built security and intimacy, it was also regarded as a place of vilification and cruelty. It was a tightrope to be traversed at home and at school because others "can be so vilifying". However, once established, their relationship created a new and different milieu of silence. Maintaining a singular silence—that is, Adam's private feelings for Josh—appeared more difficult than the public silence they shared because they were together. This new and common silence was tolerable and manageable because it, and life, was shared. As Adam said, they

... just seemed to click. We had similar interests and, you know, he was, you know, more of the man, you know. Yes, we just seemed to spend more and more time together, just the two of us: going out and going to parties together and doing this together and doing that together.

Adam 14(187)

For Adam and Josh, their relational bond was all encompassing. Every aspect of Adam's life was touched by Josh. This included such experiences as basic support, shelter, home life, school, and recreation. Added to that, Josh was his most (and perhaps only) significant friend. It was beyond attraction and sexual exploration and intimacy. As Adam indicated: "I don't know whether it was, whether I was necessarily attracted to him as such, but the fact that we just spent you know heaps of time together" [14(187)] was the significant matter. Within the context where Adam's needs were great and Josh offered so much, the core element of the relationship was the bond. However, sexual experiences formed an integral aspect of this bond. Within this context,

“both of us were passive and active, which made it better I thought ... there was no designated role to play. It was enjoyable. It wasn’t ritual or routine” [14(428-439)].

To balance this perspective against other equally important thinking, Adam indicated that while sex was a part of their relationship “I don’t think, in none of my relationships, has sex played a huge role” [14(423)]. Adam reported that this was similar to how he perceived Josh was also thinking. This was a relationship of significance on multiple levels. The end of school is one transitional marker in the life of the adolescent, and Adam indicated that the emotional and physical intimacy of the relationship “started to wane leading up to the HSC” [14(419)]. For Adam, this was, in part, a result of his increased level of wandering into the inner city. That said, Adam was able to acknowledge that it was a relationship gained through school and it sustained school through to the end.

Adam and Drake were able to make tentative moves towards connection with friends at school. They both saw relationships quietly and carefully develop. They were consummated at a sexual and emotional level. Dennis was able to enact a variant form of that strategy and achieve a similar, but non-sexual, end with Simon. While these relationships were the critical bonds of survival, they were not enough to retain the person on an educational trajectory. Alternative forms of exploration continued to be the tantalising lure away from education. *Crafting a future* can be difficult and fraught when the person is energised and guided by *multiple forces or drivers*, some of which are in conflict with each other.

### **Crafting a future, multiple drivers**

Even at *The Wall*, crafting a future is often thought about as a necessary task, and that education—in whatever form and within whichever environment—is crucial to crafting a future. One difficulty for neglected children and marginalised adolescents is that *crafting a future* and *the need for an education* are not the only active drivers of emotion and therefore behaviour. For Peter,

who experienced limited education and significant abuse, within the home and afterwards, education is a part of package into which all children must be inducted:

Like in life, when you're a young kid there should be people there helping you, guiding you in the right direction, making sure nothing happens to you. Making sure you grow up a nice young kid, healthy, to get a job, a good education.

**Peter 20(371)**

There is also a realisation that the experience of education—what it offers and produces—is essential to any person's future. Education gives the young male the perception and reality of choice. It teaches him decision making. It is one key social process that inducts him into the larger community. It helps his developing sense of social cohesion and competence. It connects him with role models and mentors. It helps him develop a healthy sense of identity. It is an apprenticeship and an initiation into the role of a responsible citizen. Whether it is gained at the time their foundational educational experience is offered, or whether it is considered and attempted later in life, it is viewed also as essential for good employment:

If I had a nice comfortable, enjoyable job, which is hard to find these days. I'm not making excuses for myself but yeah, I find this [SMSW] is easy money. It only takes, you see, the longest, a half-hour. I have anywhere from \$60 to \$80 in my pocket. And usually sometimes I'm gonna need that quick money so I can say, "Hey, here you go rent Nazi, here's the fuckin' rent, no more fuckin' questions". But in today's society, you need at least a Year 10, School Certificate, which I don't have, just to get a good paying job, not a bummer's job.

**Jason 5(706)**

For Jason, there was an obvious clash between what he had to do for survival as a given, and what he understood that he needed to do in order to progress. His definition was clear. He had to gain a minimum level of school education, since this is an essential part of crafting a future and avoiding a "bummer's job". Given that he did not have his minimum level of education, he had little choice, in his mind, but to rely on the "easy money" of SMSW.

For marginalised young people, there are multiple drivers in their lives, and these lead to conflicts of intention and direction, which invariably result in the development of other geographical and psychosocial movements. For Adam, the first of these influential drivers was

the continuation and extension of “running” which began in his early years and led to him living with Josh, while exploring other experiences:

Well, there was Josh on the day to day, Monday to Friday sort of thing, but then I'd usually still run away on weekends or you know, that sort of thing: I still say “run away”, I don't know why, to the city.

Adam 14(227)

Adam was 15 when this movement to the inner city began. The second of these alternative drivers was the desire to experience a public rather than private exploration of his sexuality. Until that inner city movement began, the exploration of his sexual preference was quarantined (either alone or with Josh), and certainly not public. This movement of “self discovery” [14(123)] was in direct conflict with his education, his relationship with Josh, and his ongoing stability. However, it pushed him to explore a new world, and this led to other practices. It began “at the Flindergarten on Flinders Street” [14(127)], a gay entertainment venue in Darlinghurst, and progressed to the red light district of Kings Cross and Darlinghurst where, “there'd be a whole group of us who would, you know, hang around *The Fountain* and *The Wall*” [14(231)]. At that point, further conclusions were reached:

I found very quickly that I could make myself quite a substantial amount of money in quite a short of period of time by just sitting down talking to people at the fountain in Kings Cross. So, yeah, found that one out quite by accident one day just wandering around.

Adam 14(127)

While the development of a relationship with Josh was measured and timely, these new discoveries occurred rapidly and with little caution. He was drawn to a place where he could find other homosexuals; driven to a public exploration of his sexuality. With that movement to the city on the weekend, Adam was exposed to other people and experiences that impacted upon all others facets of his life. In the first instance, his relationship with Josh was affected:

Adam: We were going separate ways. I was getting, I'd gotten myself into drug addiction that I wasn't handling very well and he wasn't handling it at all and that was it.

DL: What were you involved in?

Adam: I was addicted to cocaine for about two years.

DL: From when till when, how old were you?

Adam: 1997, 1998. Senior years of high school; always the best years [sarcasm].

DL: So you were addicted to cocaine during Year 11 and 12 and what was your UAI [university admission index] at school?

Adam: 87.45 [out of 100]

**Adam 14(352-367)**

While Adam attempted to craft a future, he was also dealing with conflicting drivers that energised him in different directions. He was intelligent and drawn to a more public expression of his sexual identity. This led to involvement with substance use and prostitution, all while returning to the west of Sydney to complete his final school exams. During these exams, he completed his “3 Unit Ancient History after three and a half lines [of cocaine]” [14(371)]. His university entrance score did not betray a significant impact from this exposure to the inner city, however his lifestyle was changing and the impact was nonetheless evident.

While his schooling was not grossly affected by his substance use, the relationship with Josh was affected by his experimentation. Adam was aware that Josh “wasn’t handling it at all” [14(352)] and his next few words—“and that was it”—betrayed an understanding of a perceived causal connection between his drug use and the demise of this relationship. Having drawn that connection, there was another element at play:

... there was, you know, a period during Year 11 where we had sex almost every day but then it dropped off and, you know, it was never a huge thing. I mean for me, it never has been a really huge thing. I mean, maybe that’s to do with the fact that I sold sex for a living.

**Adam 14(439)**

It was a complex emotional and physical set of experiences for Adam. Driven by the desire for education, he was also driven to the inner city to explore that which had been either socially hidden or explored only with Josh. However, he entered the city in an available and unguarded manner. The back and forth movement, and the alternative activities, impacted on Josh. Adam also realised that it impacted on him. Selling sex and substance use—specific and driving forces in the crafting of his immediate future—were central elements in the fragmentation of intimacy and in the loss of this important relationship.

Sometime after his final high school exams, the relationship between Adam and Josh ended. Yet the memory survived and remained positive. Of the relationship with a “rough and tumble” [14(175)] boy, Adam indicates it is “just a fond memory to look back on really. I mean it’s only when the name is mentioned, or it’s like, you know, or there’s specific smells and that sort of thing, but I am very much like that” [14(331)]. Beyond being “just a fond memory”, and despite the initial protestation, the experience with Josh has impregnated Adam’s senses, leaving an indelible mark on him.

While the defining experience with Josh produced strong and lasting memories, this experience was not indicative of a sustained direction, or priority, in life along similar lines. Suburban living, engaging in post-school education, with a relationship of substance and longevity, were not the goals that were driving Adam, at least at that point in time. There were other geographical and psychosocial drivers. They were embedded in the experience of public sexual awakening. It involved street life, substance use and consequential drug- and survival-related sex work. These were all more powerful determinants, in terms of life direction, at least in the short term. Education, while a priority, suffered. That said, it was retained as a reference point and stimulus when he thought about crafting a future:

Adam: Yeah. For a long time I fought very strongly against the word “potential”.

DL: Do you still fight against that?

Adam: To a degree, yes. It’s only been in the last little while [at 21], that I’ve actually gone, “Oh, maybe I do [have potential].”

DL: Is it presumptuous of me to think you might eventually go back to uni?

Adam: No, it’s not presumptuous. I probably will. Whether I do, the Ancient History Dip Ed or not, I don’t know. I won’t be able to anyway because I won’t be able to be a teacher.

**Adam 14(382-391)**

Something had changed since Adam was at school. He was a high achiever in secondary education, who was able to secure significant stability and close connections, against an immediate backdrop of homelessness. At the time of the interview, he doubted, and in fact fought “strongly against”, the idea of his “potential”, while pondering the belief that he could no

longer be a teacher because he now had a criminal record. Yet he continued to ponder education as a possible pathway forward.

Notwithstanding the trauma, isolation, homelessness, abuse and loss of belief in self experienced by many of the participants, education and work can still be the crafted pathway forward for them. Stimulated, in part, by the desire for change, they are able to call on their past experiences of education, and the common and shared wisdom that education is of significance in the creation of the future:

I was at that point I had to give up, you know, I needed my life back. I couldn't - I just sat down and had a really big cry and, yeah, I started working as an assistant nurse and also working *The Wall* too. Then I started working night shifts as assistant nurse and that sort of got me away from that and, yeah, then I just wanted to further on my education. I thought I can't work and use drugs and try and become a nurse and say, "I care" when, you know, you're shoving a needle up your arm full of heroin and you're saying you care, you know, so, yeah. From there I sort of went cold turkey and got into my; tried to get into [nursing] as an enrolled nurse, didn't accept me and then I done my entrance exams and got in as an RN, which I was quite happy to do as my ENs then my RNs, you know.

**Richard 1(392)**

Richard tapped into his past experience and the common societal wisdom about education. He combined this with a sense of urgency for change—"I needed my life back"—and this rich combination is what makes education a useful pathway.

Timeliness is significant in this crafting process. Urgency may be present, as it was for Richard, but urgency can be illusory and no more than an indicator of anxiety, rather than of a desire and capacity for change. While offers of access to education can be made, the person needs to possess some availability to change and development. These are crucial in the creation of a future, as it was for Brian who, at 22 and at the time of the second interview, felt able to utilise anew, the experience of education:

I was doing the butchering course you know two years ago and working for a little bit then but I don't know, it just wasn't like what I'm doing now. I'm actually really enjoying it [an art course] because, I don't know, the people in the class are really good and the teachers are really good.

**Brian 12b(502)**

When the time is right, education and the people and structures associated with it can become significant agents of change and development. This occurs primarily because of the connectivity that is achieved between the person seeking access and the program or option on offer. For this possibility to work, those offering assistance must be imbued with openness, creativity and an understanding of difference.

Even with a myriad personal and social drivers—sometimes creating chaos, but always influential—education can be a part of crafting a future. This is far from simple. Rarely do young males lunge forth from *The Wall* directly into mainstream education. It is more likely that there are preparatory steps within this developmental process. Incremental or substantive change may begin with a momentary absence from *The Wall*. In such moments, they may experiment with *alternatives that mediate* change and development. It is these momentary shifts that guide them gradually into the world they dream of and sometimes actively seek.

### **Alternatives that mediate**

Some participants mobilised education—through thought and action—into a tool of personal leverage towards change. It became a way to break out of what they regarded as a negative and debilitating lifestyle. Sometimes, this attempt was made at a moment of absolute crisis. Damien attempted a residential rehabilitation experience away from the city as a way of leveraging himself away from *The Wall* and substance use:

Yeah, *The Wilderness Centre*, yeah. I thought it might be something different. You know, I was sort of getting a bit overwhelmed with, you know, all the stuff that goes on around here on the streets and I just thought, yeah, maybe it's time to try something else, so I did, and yeah. I did all right after that. I finished the program and went back to school, finished my Year 10.

**Damien 4(384)**

While this experience provided respite, change, and the possibility of a future through education, the power of the alternative drivers in his life appeared perennial, for “by the time [he] was 18, [he] was back down [at *The Wall*] again doing the same stuff” [4(384)]. Notwithstanding the

collapse of this endeavour, what is noteworthy is that he attempted a program that involved an alternative form of education. This alternative mediated a way forward through to more formal education. While the notion of an educational alternative is an essential element of the process, it is clear that these alternatives are *peopled processes*. Both elements—alternative education and people—are what make the strategies and pathways possible and effective.

For some who are caught up within this inner city world, developing and enacting strategies and pathways occurs in concert with another person in an intimate relationship. For Jack, education did not stand alone as a goal to be sought. It had to be couched within a shared context in order to be valued and enacted as an effective strategy for change:

We want to move to Cairns or up that way just after Mardi Gras. Sort of like go up there and not work but be on the dole and like study, get some education and maybe start a business in a few years. But yes, looking like long, long term. I mean we're talking about being together for the next 10 years already. It's bizarre, really bizarre but, I don't know, we just clicked really well. So he is someone that I can see myself being with for a long period of time and someone who has got the same sort of ideals and saying he wants to live the same kind of lifestyle I want to live. So we've got a lot in common.

**Jack 26(250)**

In the process of development and change, a number of elements were involved. It was not just an educational opportunity. For Jack, the intimate relationship created the necessary and repetitive “we”. It was a common ground that encompassed shared goals and endeavours. This shared process strengthened resolve and increased capacity.

The connection back into education can come through the discovery of common threads of human experience. The common thread becomes a reason to trust and a motive to accept advice. Brian made contact with a counsellor at a youth project offering short courses in art and music:

I was talking to the student counsellor there and like I was just talking to her, I kind of opened up about working and stuff to her and she was all right with it because she was saying that she worked with some sex workers when she was overseas like a couple of years ago or something and she said she was going to look into getting some, into finding a counsellor for sex workers.

**Brian 12b(502)**

The counsellor was able to validate his experience by relaying her own connection to a variant form of his own world. Her ability to connect with him supported his on-going involvement with the alternative education program. His immersion into this new world challenged the other more debilitating or distracting driver in his life. All of the elements in Brian's experience were important to the success of the strategy. He connected with an alternative form of education. This program had the potential to lead him into mainstream education. What sealed the experience as positive and helpful was his involvement with a person who could identify with his world.

Supportive, understanding and sensitive outreach counsellors and welfare workers perform another important function for the young male at *The Wall*. If they come to *The Wall*, they can break into long non-work periods of SMSW, creating a reminder of other possibilities in life:

I've known you and Juan and the workers [counsellors] here for a long time, and I suppose, in a way, it's a good thing if you are walking through [*The Wall*] and see me and do come up and say hello because it's just, it's a different world, being in that world, and then having a different part, like a different reality brought into it. It's just like. It just makes me think about something else.

**Brian 12a(239)**

For males who engage in SMSW, access to that educational experience is not enough. Access and participation cannot be sustained without a form of support that acts as a consistent connecting agent between fragmentation and positive future-oriented activity. The sensitive intrusions support, and remind Brian of, a "different reality". It is the adult's willingness and ability to enter into Brian's world that mediates other options and other thoughts, including thoughts about the significance of education in crafting a future. As Drake indicated, "I got there [into education] basically because of the counsellors and the people, my shrink and the workers" [6(180)], who stimulated interest and supported ongoing involvement in education. People are the carriers of possibility. Opportunities occur because of the connections that are established. Whether driven by a counsellor or instigated and driven by the young male these connections breach the isolation

so often experienced at *The Wall* and create options. As we see with Damien, Jack, Brian and Drake, these connections are desired because they have positive emotional and physical outcomes.

Shaun had a clear understanding of what made the mediating alternative satisfying. First, it was the persistence of the person mediating the alternative. It was a worker from a welfare outreach program who “for years ... tried to get me into refuges and she was always, just come, spend a night and then one night it worked and one night I went and stayed at Oasis and I think that was the last night I worked ... you know, it took her a couple of words to get me into a refuge and get me off the whole scene” [16(911)]. It was the persistent words of another person, outside his world, that provided a way forward. They were words about new possibilities and words that provided new information. Having said that, once introduced to an educational program, success is never guaranteed. Alternative educational programs can fail if they do not take into account the psychological realities of the young males concerned. After settling into the refuge, Shaun took part in a group self-insight program that stressed discussion and personal disclosure:

After I did Vital [an adventure learning course], I did Choises [sic] [group program] and that's when I let everything out: [at] Choises. It did nothing for me. I spent a week there spilling everything and it did nothing. It did jack shit! So [I'll] just never do it again. I think the course was a failure.

Shaun 16(1136)

While it is important to move into the world of the person engaged in SMSW, and invite him to engage in other possibilities, the educational program must understand the needs and vulnerability of the young male. Failures in programming can have serious consequences for later participation in formal education.

Notwithstanding the potential for errors in the alternatives that mediate change, the desire for development is far from quenched. This is especially the case where the relational connection is valued because of the experience of care, and the connection is productive in other

areas. Even where there has been a failure of significance to him, he remains able to value the overall contact:

Shaun: ... I want to sort of put back into the system, and I want to give back to what got given to me. I know there's one more person out there that is just waiting for a couple of words, and boom, they will be out of the system completely.

DL: That's interesting. So is it possible for words to have an influence over people?

Shaun: More than possible.

DL: How does that happen?

Shaun: Just being a friend. Just knowing that there's other opportunities out there; that you don't have to go that far [i.e., *into* SMSW] to get money.

Shaun 16(910-919)

It is the utterances of friends that make the difference. As if to reinforce the notion and identify his own desires, Shaun defines the people whose friendship and words he seeks. They are the "workers, the youth workers. [They are] the people who actually do care, not that sit beside desks and do paperwork after paperwork. It's the people who get out there and do the outreach programs that actually make the difference" 16(931)]. They offer *alternatives that mediate* development and change.

In some situations, and for the sake of health and wellbeing, alternative educational programs may need to be actively and forcibly applied. Where chaos is manifest, responsiveness can be variable, often tepid, and sometimes barely alive. This can be the case particularly at the height of a person's involvement in substance abuse. Leyton had been homeless and living in inner city squats since he was 14. Working *The Wall* was a part of his early adolescent experience, as was a significant benzodiazepine addiction. This created the environment where criminal activity became a significant problem and release from juvenile detention was conditional upon his acceptance of admission to a residential rehabilitation program. He was unequivocally positive regarding mandated external intervention: "I think it has in the past: intervention from police, from JJ, from DoCS. You know, even though I was resistant to it all, I think it still saved my arse at times, so to speak" [27(331)].

For Leyton, it was not simply a matter of enduring the experience of forced intervention. It was an alternative form of education that mediated an exploration of self and of others:

Leyton: There was something that came up in part of my treatment when I was in rehab about it that was just sort of an idea tossed around. I don't know how much truth there was to that. That was about my father being away a lot when I was younger and me looking for some sort of love or attention from males.

DL: What did you think of that theory?

Leyton: I didn't really give it much thought, to tell you the truth.

DL: You don't think it holds much water?

Leyton: Well, I actually think it does, so that's why I choose not to think about it. Because it sounds pretty fuckin sick and twisted to me. But it sounds like it could have some substance to it, so I choose not to; rather not think about that, yeah.

Leyton 27(266-275)

Notwithstanding the ambivalence about personal insight, a critical part of the alternative that involved education and that mediated potential change was the people that supported his change. The rehab workers provided “support. For me, incentive, um, yeah, just good friends, honourable people, who have gone through recovery and are still doing it” [27(299)]. It was the alternative education processes that stimulated understanding, and it was the “good friends” and “honourable people” who had themselves “gone through recovery” that sustained an interest in progress. Education and people are the *alternatives that mediate* change and progress for the person engaged in SMSW.

## Conclusion

The world of the person engaged in SMSW is a hidden and silent one. In the absence of clear and detailed words about the fullness of their lives, presumptions rule. This chapter has dealt with a hidden issue of significance to this group of marginalised males — that of education. For many of these men, they departed from school when they were somewhere between 13 and 15. It is likely that they were viewed as troubled and beyond what the school environment could deal with in any constructive and positive way. From an environment that was often over-

populated, fast moving and impersonal, they disappeared to another and foreign geographic place and into the darkness of the night. Some research suggests that this point marks the death of education.

This chapter has considered a different perspective. By exploring the different facets of their varied experiences, in and outside school, we have gained a rich understanding of the various elements that make up their interaction with education. First, it can be viewed as a *protective experience* where their presence in school alleviates, and sometimes prevents, exposure to other negative influences. Once there, and with the balance being in favour of positive rather than negative encounters within the school environment, exposure to education can bring with it many positive experiences. First and foremost, it can act as a *reference point and guide*. At times, schools are large, fast moving and impersonal, and the difficulties experienced outside the school at times combine with the negative elements of mass education, so that school becomes a place of *alienation*. Sometimes this occurs because the person gets lost within the education system. At other times, the alienation emerges because difference is shunned and the young male is exposed to ridicule.

A number of the participants discovered love and intimate friendship within the context of school. Notwithstanding the positive elements of these encounters, they were enlivened within a context that often shuns difference. Thus, these *intimate friendships* were set within the context of *silence*. In each case, it was a difficult and demanding juggling act that often saw the person seek a less constrained avenue where unfettered exploration could take place. The city was the place where difference was accepted and even encouraged. However, this exacerbated the power of previously hidden psychosocial forces and complicated their efforts at *crafting a future*. These forces manifested themselves in forms such as substance use, sex work, homelessness and criminality. The power of the *multiple drivers* that were awakened through exposure to the inner city hindered and sometimes quashed, at least temporarily, the future-seeking drivers.

What is significant is that even within the context where education and the future are threatened by powerful and negative forces, education never ceases to galvanise attention. Where other drivers have had their sway, movements forward are inevitably delayed, or denied, for some time. They are rarely extinguished. People, often welfare workers and counsellors, endeavour to create and offer *alternatives that mediate* other thinking and other ways forward. These other people can also take the form of friends, lovers, welcoming people within social organisations, and statutory groups that forcefully remove the person from their negative context.

The end point is clear. Education is generally important in human development. It is particularly important to those whose lives have been rocked by negative influences. This is because education has the capacity to create options and choices. It is a perennial thought-line that is difficult to destroy. Education is ever present in the public domain. It is advertised and talked about, and this has an impact, even on the person engaged in sex work at *The Wall*. However, what brings it alive, and with passion, is the connection with professionals — youth workers, allied health workers and counsellors. They annunciate a repetitive mantra about the value of the person and the usefulness of education in thinking about the future. It is these people—in school, on the street, in agencies or in the alternative forms of education—that form the basis of any connectivity with education. Without their friendly utterances, education in the lives of males engaged in street-based sex work may remain no more than an idea.

# Chapter 7

## CONCLUSION: REFLECTIONS ON VULNERABILITY, CONNECTIVITY AND RESILIENCE

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### Introduction

Previous studies on male sex work have focussed on various themes that permeate public and research discourse on this controversial and marginal health and social issue. In general terms, early research focussed on deviance and psychopathology. As a consequence of the advent of HIV and AIDS, more recent research has emphasised public and individual health. Regardless of the focus, this diverse body of literature has attempted to shed light on the multifaceted phenomenon of SMSW, crafting an increasingly complex picture of the phenomenon of street-based sex work. This present study acknowledges and adds to this body of research by focussing, in an intense and fine-grain manner, on the people within the phenomenon of SMSW: their history, experiences and relationships. First, I explore four indicative narratives within the experience of SMSW. Second, I then explore the relational experiences in which each participant engaged throughout his life. Finally, I examine the place of education as a particular social and relational encounter of significance.

What is evident throughout this present research is that *vulnerability*, *connectivity* and *resilience* are ever-present in a dynamic and complex fashion. The paradox of survival in the face of challenges and adversity is profoundly significant in this study. It is to a discussion of these three phenomena in the lives of those engaged in SMSW that I now move.

Prior to discussing the import of this current research to our understanding of SMSW, it is important to recap the theoretical stage against which other researchers see adolescents and young adults live out their *vulnerability* and *resilience*. The research in this area has been adequately covered in Chapter 2. It will suffice here to recap the research on this as a preamble to considering how *vulnerability* and *resilience* are played out in the lives of those engaged in SMSW.

As a counsellor, as well as a researcher, it is impossible to complete such a research project without giving some consideration to the issue of clinical intervention, that is, how we support young people for whom part of their life experience involves working at *The Wall*. After a consideration of intervention, I then return for a final time to consider the methodology of this research work. I also explore the limitations of the research and consider possible future directions for research with young males engaged in SMSW within the Australian context.

## **Understanding vulnerability and resilience**

Vulnerability has been described as “an interactive process between the social contexts in which a young person lives and a set of underlying factors that, when present, place the young person *at risk* for negative outcomes” (Blum et al., 2002, p. 28). Adolescents and young adults who experience marginalisation—of whatever kind—are often viewed as vulnerable in their world and therefore at risk of negative personal health and social outcomes in life (Nightingale & Fischhoff, 2002). Their vulnerability is present because of this *interactive process* between social context and the underlying factors in the life of a person. A social environment of disadvantage and disconnection from family heighten vulnerability (Blum et al., 2000). Personal experiences

such as homelessness and substance use, exacerbate the experience of vulnerability (Song et al., 2000).

External fragmentation can produce psychological sequelae such as intense isolation and anxiety and the loss of a sense of coherence within self (Marsh et al., 2007). This raises the prospect of depression and other psychological consequences that can manifest later as chronic health problems (Berdahl et al., 2005). Abuse in its various forms can have a physiological as well as a psychological impact (Teicher et al., 2006). Geographical isolation further complicates isolation and its impacts (Armstrong & Manion, 2006). There is mounting evidence that supports the existence of an intergenerational transfer of risk and vulnerability (Serbin & Karp, 2004).

The research literature on adolescents and young adults contains extensive research on the concept and experience of vulnerability, risk and resilience. Resilience has been described as “a class of phenomena characterized by patterns of positive adaptation in the context of significant adversity or risk” (Masten & Reed, 2002, p. 75). It is dynamic, unpredictable and unique to each person. It is about individual recovery from psychosocial insult rather than about personal invincibility. The psychosocial interactions out of which resilience arises occur between the person, his family and his social ecology.

The literature on vulnerability and resilience focuses on *capacity-building* and this arises as we are able to enhance the protective factors within the person, in his family and within the social environment (Kumpfer, 1999; Resnick et al., 1997). Strengthening family connectedness so that it protects against exposure and harm is the primary element in capacity building within the person (Gest et al., 1993). Strengthening the extended social environment is the second most significant strategy in developing resilience (Libbey et al., 2002). The presence of positive emotions impacts greatly on coping within stressful situations (Ong, Bergeman et al., 2006).

Resilience is never a quality and experience separate to the person and his environment. It arises out of an interaction between the two. It is brought to fruition by the relationships he develops, particularly through his childhood and adolescence. Bell (2001) refers to the metaphor

of “rebuilding the village” as the way to encourage the ability in young people to “attract and use support” (p. 375). This highlights a crucial point in resilience thinking. Connectivity (relationships and community) is crucial in the enhancement of protective factors and positive emotions in any life, but especially in young lives. Conversely, sustained resilience does not exist outside the context of relationships that seek the good of the person. This is where the paradox occurs within this research for the “village” that young males engaged in SMSW inhabit can easily be viewed as the source of their downfall. At least at a superficial level, it is rarely viewed as the cradle of their own resilience. The significance of this current research is that it takes the well-thought-through notions—such as vulnerability and resilience—and the prior research on male sex work, and reconsiders them in a combined fashion. I look for the moments of more-than-mere-survival within a “village” context usually associated with destruction and death (SMSW). This is where the uniqueness lies within this research and it is to this discussion that I now turn.

### **Contribution of the research**

The 27 in-depth interviews that form the basis of this research provide a resounding space for often voiceless people. Being without voice, their lives and their place in society are often lost in the fast-moving detail of the modern city, the large school, near full employment demanding high and flexible skills, and the family that moves on in their absence. They also disappear from view when the focus of research is on particular forms of behaviour (such as their sexual practices) or discrete consequences of behaviour (such as HIV/AIDS). The contribution made by this current research to a psychosocial understanding of street-based sex work is in the contextualising of the person and his experience. I do this by avoiding reductionist approaches that separate the behaviour and experience from the person, and the person from his context and psychosocial environment. I achieve this in three key ways. First, I develop an *understanding of the complexity and context* of his life through a close and detailed illumination of untold stories. Second,

I explore the place of *relationships* with *others* but also with *self*. Third, I illuminate one critical set of relationships by examining the significance of *education* in his life, in all its different manifestations.

### Understanding complexity and context

By following, in minute detail, the lives of young men who engaged in SMSW, we gained access to the experience of young men, for whom street-based sex work was but one part of a richly contoured life. The significance of this fine-grained approach means that we gained—for knowledge and clinical practice—a greater opportunity and capacity to fathom the reality of each person's unique existence. By approaching each person's unique existence, we avoided being caught up in speculation and stereotyping that can easily occur through limited observation, issue-specific research or approaches that somehow view the phenomenon but not the person within the phenomenon. While earlier research focussed on issue-specific research, such as deviance (Luckenbill, 1986), sexual risk behaviours (Rotheram-Borus & Koopman, 1991), HIV/AIDS (Bloor, McKeganey, Finlay, & Barnard, 1992) or sexual abuse (Parsons et al., 2005), this research considers the broader perspective that seeks to place each of these discrete phenomenon within a larger personal context that gives meaning to these discrete experiences.

People in general often refer to these young men as prostitutes or sex workers. Research also engages in this practice. It is a habit I have attempted to avoid throughout my clinical practice, research and writing. For each participant, sex work was but one aspect of his life. While it may be partially—or even dominantly—defining for a period, or even a short moment in time, his life was much *more complex than the reductionist labelling* implies. Further, to understand the even momentary practice of sex work, the background against which this behaviour is located must never be ignored. The significance of this much broader picture of the person is a good reason to avoid referring to the person as a sex worker or prostitute, or by any other reductionist label (such as “drug addict”). Further, and perhaps most significantly, the participants often held a

great distaste for the practice of reductionist labelling, as typified most stridently by Brian when he said, with passion and anger, of the clients that “they think that I’m a prostitute and they think that I’m scum of the earth” [12a(291)]. The connection he made was illuminating. Brian, like many of the other participants, tried hard to avoid the experience of being viewed as, or treated like, “scum”.

A way to begin to approach them as more than a label is to see and experience them in all their complexity. This was visible through the four indicative narratives, but also through the examination of their relationships and their experience of education. This present examination of their experience confounds many of the stereotypes that have emerged in other research. He may engage in sex work but he is greater than the sum of his sex work experiences. Defining him through the use of a simplistic label restricts our capacity to understand the complexity of his life experience. It also means that we fail to grapple with the full meaning of this and every other interrelated aspect of his past and present. The participants made it abundantly clear that what they seek from others is understanding and the avoidance of reductionism.

It is clear from extant research that because of prior disadvantage and homelessness, many of those who engage in SMSW have, at some stage, resorted to substance use and criminal activity (Cohan et al., 2006; Luckenbill, 1986; Rotheram-Borus et al., 1996). It is also clear from this large body of research that safety in their sexual practices may vary according to a range of factors (Joffe & Dockrell, 1995; Minichiello et al., 2003). However, there is more to the lives of these young men than homelessness, substance use and unsafe sexual practices: *more than* the sum of these practices, and *more to* these practices that is implied by a label or a singular focus. By tracing their narratives and the fine detail of their relational encounters—relationships in general and in education specifically—we were able to see the complex and mercurial co-existence of negative and positive events — in the past and during their period at *The Wall*. We were also able to view these singular events as meaningful only against the larger picture of their lives that was brought to the fore by the detailed narratives.

In significant ways, these events and their lives are unpredictable. I am not saying here that their lives lack any form of pattern but they do defy easy (or perhaps any) explanation. Whether it was Brian who chose to leave his home and live a life dominated by homelessness and substance use, or Jules who engaged in sex work even though he had a university degree. What these participants sought was that we understand the complexity within their narrative and the depth and reasoning behind their practices.

Thus, the uniqueness of this current research is in the rich and intimate details that flesh out what is already known and intuited about SMSW. Most significantly, we also discovered what had been hidden from us about the life of the young male engaged in SMSW. Invariably, it has been hidden because we have not discovered the way to gain his attention and his trust so that *his* understanding of life could become apparent to us. Because we have had access to his thoughts, experiences, and his dreams, this research has added to our understanding and appreciation of the context of his life and the subset contexts into which many of his experiences have been embedded. By gaining access to this intimate and detailed contextual material, we have begun to comprehend—and approach an understanding of—the internal and external dialogues that have informed and influenced the daily negotiations he has carried out: with his environment, the people in his life, within himself, and the thoughts he has about his future.

A crucial area where these silent, yet powerful, dialogues are rarely enunciated in any detail is in the area of premature sexualisation and sexual abuse. Past research has focussed on the experience of premature sexualisation and sexual abuse, and its connection to male sex work. It has examined the fact that it occurs and is necessarily negative (Holmes & Slap, 1998, 1999) or not (Bauserman & Rind, 1997; Rind et al., 1999) and that it is associated with involvement with sex work (Abramovich, 2005; Parsons et al., 2005). In the current research, a number of the participants recounted their experiences in significant detail. They considered the experiences, and the dynamics, that formed a part of this aspect of their lives: silence, power, loss, negotiation or not, the fear and/or belief that others (parents in particular) knew but took no action. A

number of the participants brought such stories to the fore in the narrative retelling. Jack, Peter, Damien, Drake, Raymond, and Shaun all spoke of what were, for each of them, unspeakable events. In the unfolding of the narrative, context and understanding became evident. In the retelling, they added a depth of meaning to their past experience as well as to the experience of involvement in sex work.

Perhaps it was Dominic who spoke most fervently, and expansively, of the context and complexity of silenced experience and how the breaching of that silence marked an unpacking of the narrative that provided understanding and meaning to the full gamut of his experience. He spoke about his early exposure to people outside of his family and sexual abuse, about which he was silent prior to disclosures during the research interview. His perception that his parents either knew of the abuse and took no action, or simply failed to notice that he was sexually abused at seven years of age, brought about a fragmentation in his thinking and experience of family and home. Homelessness and despair were made logical and rational by the disconnection between his experience and that of his parents. While a tragic narrative that was riddled with despair, the detail that was gleaned through his open re-telling was what made this research unique. It provided a depth of understanding and meaning to all facets of his life, and not just to those connected to sex work. The aim of the research was to encourage him to tell his story. The outcome was a contextualised understanding of Dominic, where sex work was but one significant aspect of a rich and complex narrative.

Dominic spoke of his involvement in SMSW in an almost cavalier fashion. It was simply a reality he had to deal with for much of his adolescence. By opening up the fuller psychosocial context of experience, we began to understand the richly textured background against which he made decisions about sex work, substance use, crime, relationships, and his future. Sex work was not simply a series of events. It had meaning, and the meaning was forcefully coloured by a complex past. In the retelling of this story, he gained an appreciative listener and, through the dialogical movement that was created, some insight and further understanding about himself.

Being privy to this level of openness is a profoundly significant and humbling experience. It helps us to understand the phenomenon of SMSW *and* the person within the phenomenon — in all their complexity and by ignoring none of it. Appreciating the full context of meaning-laden events is an essential element in our sensitisation to the reality of lives lived at the margins of society. Good policy making and intervention can only arise out of such a contextualised understanding.

With Dominic, we capture the personal, the familial and the psychosocial. It is a social ecology—of events and feelings—from which he flees. With Nick, a 17 year old who identified as heterosexual, we captured something of *the power of the personal and social environment*, and its influence on his thinking and actions. Unlike Dominic, Nick seeks to remain in, and be influenced by, this world. His brother's criminal history and prior involvement in sex work was a powerful catalyst for Nick. His mother's history of abuse, her own sex work, multiple partners, and history of domestic violence all exercised a significant influence on his childhood and adolescent formation and development. Family events also influenced his incursion into the street-life of the inner city of Sydney. It was not simply about whether or not he engaged in sex work and substance use. We saw the subtle influences, the loyalty to family and history, the need to help his brother, the intense violence of a life lived on the street, the powerful influence of others in the way he thought about his future directions. It is not possible to understand Nick unless we recognise and deepen our understanding of his embeddedness within a social and personal, historical environment, against which meaning in his life was gained. Like Nick, Peter is also the subject of intense violence at home, with relatives, and subsequently on the street. Later in life, he mournfully regrets that he likewise adopted practices that facilitated younger boys on the street being subjected to the wiles of unconscionable "mugs". It is not possible to understand his involvement in male sex work and the violence that accompanied these events without exploring the complex events that led him to *The Wall*.

The defining influence of psychosocial environment was a repetitive theme throughout the narratives that formed the basis of this research. However, it was most obvious when the influence was negative, such as when there was abuse or violence. In these situations, it marked the person, creating pathways forward, over which he appeared to have little control during his adolescence. There was a driven-ness in their movement towards SMSW. Only during adulthood were some able to apply reflexive action and consider the experiences anew. This was the case with Drake, Peter and Nick, who were all able to see that the past had carved out pathways forward with which they were not completely satisfied. They acted on these insights endeavouring to carve out new pathways forward — in terms of relationships and career path.

We do not expect growth to come from trauma or torture but this occurred for many of the participants. Dominic, Peter, Robert, and Jack, while still affected by the traumatic aspects of their past, were able to learn and grow rather than flee from their past experience. By way of example, Peter was violated sexually and physically when a child. He repeated this pattern in his sex work experience and in other early adult relationships. He spent time in gaol and then realised, on the basis of experience and with reflection, that he wanted other things from life. Other forms of work and other types of relationships emerged in his life, and while he could not expunge the past, he was able to grow from and past it. This capacity for retrieving good from harmful and negative experiences points to the existence of a personal and social reservoir of resilience. While other research focuses on discrete elements of experience, a more comprehensive narrative approach leads to an exploration beyond any singular focus of attention. This leads to a more detailed understanding of the place, and limits, of negativity and harmful experiences.

Thus, notwithstanding the *stand out* quality of negativity and harmful experiences—that even produce growth—these were not the only environmental factors that cast an influence over the past and future pathways of the participants. Good things happened but the difference was that these were, at times, overwhelmed by greater and more negative influences. They often

remained unseen or perhaps even under-valued. When they were noticed, they were cherished. The paradox was that even the good client was appreciated, liked, cherished and valued beyond the sex work encounter. When this occurred, they were incorporated into the mainstream of life as a positive element in their social environment. A number of the participants endeavoured to create harmony within the experiential world by joining apparently disparate aspects of life together. Jules immediately informed his sisters and mother when he began sex work at 16. Their acceptance runs counter to common understandings of how adolescent sex work would be handled by relatives and friends. Dennis has the same experience. Over time, he introduces his school mate to his *other* world. Nick's mother gives permission for her son to be interviewed and her knowledge of this *other* aspect of his life does not bring about her abandonment of him. These *incorporating movements* run counter to much of the early literature and are not dealt with in later research. These brief but significant stories of incorporation raise other research questions that will be mentioned later in this chapter. The point is, sex work necessarily involves other people, and not just the clients. There is positive and supportive connectivity, even in the environment where sex work occurs.

This present research taps into a relatively new understanding of self as contextualised. It is a postmodern construction (Harvey, 1990). It is beyond a deistic or providential world view where the person was attributed with worth because of a connection to God. It is far from the disengaged decontextualised self of modernity, where functionality and production were significant in defining the person (Taylor, 1989). The postmodern self, while not necessarily ignoring the ideas and notions of the past, is nonetheless a contextualised construct, where history and the fibres of daily life are an essential element of the construction of self (Gergen, 1994). By considering, in intimate detail, these dynamic movements from vulnerability to resilience via connectivity, we begin to consider, in a more informed and realistic manner, the psychosocial and health needs of those who engage in SMSW. Service provision—such as health and social services—to marginalised populations sometimes *misses the mark* because it fails to

understand the complexity of people's lives. It is not simply a failure to comprehend the depth of their trauma and suffering. Without a *contextualised understanding of the person and his experience*, it is impossible to appreciate the mercurial—often silent—movements that make up both vulnerability and resilience. Without a contextualised appreciation of personal and social life experience, there is no understanding of the place of the often hidden relationships that make for connectedness in life. Thus, without context, there is a failure to appreciate the power of their resilience and the way this is fashioned through connectedness. As a consequence, marginalised people fail to gain access to that which they need in terms of service provision. This occurs because service providers fail to understand that certain types of relational experiences are a part of vulnerability, while other types of relational experiences are the vehicles for resilience. This is highly relevant for young males who engage in SMSW. Their need for services is great but if they are not couched within a relational context that makes connectivity viable, then the connection between the young male and the service will not be made.

However, their comments are not solely of a critical nature. At various times throughout the research, the participants provided an understanding of the context of support that was most useful to them, and this is where we see the *power and significance of connectivity and its relationship to good practice*. For many of the participants, couching support within a positive relational framework is imperative. For example, Steph felt connected with a medical service, and a particular doctor, because “it’s free [at the clinic] and I *have* got a good doctor. He’s a good counsellor too. Like he talks about it, explains everything to me. He’s good — that big ring hanging out of his nose” [13(351-359)]. There were many connection points between Steph and his doctor. Some were substantive and crucial to the imparting of essential health information, like “he explains everything”. Others show the breadth of the encounter—he is also a “counsellor”—and the significance of the encounter not being about health information. The physical aspects of the person, while seemingly superficial, are also important. What it may

indicate is the capacity within the doctor to appreciate difference in the *other* because he is not fearful of expressing *otherness* himself.

Connectivity, as the basis of good health service provision, is a package deal. There is a heightened availability within the service as a whole. The presence of a person engaged in street-based sex work speaks positively—at an agency level—about the provision of health services within that particular context. However, availability to connectivity, and hence good service provision, is captured by the *individuals providing the service, as well as by the agency*. There is an understanding of need, of context and of the mechanisms by which connections are made and needs are satisfied. Steph is treated as a person and as an individual, not just as a patient with health needs. This complex desire to be *treated as a person with needs* is a desire borne out within recent literature around help-seeking. Howerton et al., (2007), in their study of male offenders, noted that distrust of authority, chaotic family life and a pervasive fear of being diagnosed as mentally ill were three critical factors that prevented an already marginalised population group from accessing health care. Conversely, certain personal characteristics such as respect, the ability to listen and be compassionate were the features of a service provider that made access possible. Seemingly trivial gestures—such as the way the practitioner relates—are imperative. As Drake made evident when he spoke about his counsellor, and as Jeffrey indicated when he spoke of the one attentive carer in the institution — relationships matter. They are not superfluous to service delivery. There is nothing trivial about the minor rituals that lubricate the provision of a good service. Service provision that is devoid of an affective connection can miss the mark.

Relationships with health service providers are always potentially positive experiences. However, these are not the only encounters for the young male who works *The Wall*. The desire within, and ability of, the person to *modify and mould negative experience* was of paramount significance in this research. Much of the extant research on resilience has focused on the influence and impact of the social environment (e.g., Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Masten & O'Connor, 1989). What we gain from this current research is an in-depth understanding of the

participant's capacity to *modify and mould his environment and his experience*—even the most negative of experiences—towards positive ends. Like many of the participants, Brian became homeless and was influenced by the people and environment to which he was introduced by others who had been in a similar situation to him. He began work at *The Wall* but quickly realised that this repulsed him. Standing on a curb, being jeered at and mocked by passing traffic, did nothing but deplete any psychological strength he possessed. He recognised that, because of his substance use, he had to work. He tailored a client group from *The Wall* into a private list of clients. Not only were they amenable to this moulding, they maintained a willingness to engage with him for sex work at a level that was comfortable for Brian. There was little anal sex and where it occurred, Brian was the active rather, than receptive, participant. Most of the time, the sex his clients wanted was to perform oral sex on Brian. Further, he developed a rapport such that they supplied him with drugs. He remained repulsed by his need to work, but he creatively modified and moulded these encounters so as to limit the damage that occurred to him.

While the unknowing outsider may judge this behaviour as negative and counter productive to his psychosocial and physical health, the intimate and fine-grained exploration we have gained allows us to approach the experience from another perspective. Life was out of his control when Brian was at *The Wall*. By modifying and moulding the encounters—and filtering client access to himself—he was increasingly in control and the MSW was driven and controlled in the end by Brian. This developing capacity eventually led to a taste for control, major life changes, and a move away from sex work. It was a complex and ever-developing process that could only be understood—by the outsider—if access was granted to the larger context of his own life experiences. Similar narratives were found with Steph and his encounters. Modifying occurred. His involved a change of venue and a filtering of clients. Clients were chosen for many different reasons, however, control and the moulding of the client contact to an acceptable form was a principal endeavour. Dennis was able to socialise his clients— another form of moulding. Nick crafted friendship within his encounters. Within the research, it is a pathologising approach

that picks up on the young male's manipulation of negative encounters. A resilience framework highlights that any positive move towards insight and personal control—and positive development—is good for personal and public health.

While this research addresses many salient questions about the practices involved in street-based sex work, it also provides an understanding of a life lived on the street, at *The Wall* and beyond. We get to know the person within the phenomenon of SMSW, and these are revelations worthy of careful consideration. What we gain from such careful consideration will impact in a positive manner on the way we relate to, and intervene in, the lives of those adolescents and young adults who are most marginalised. Relationships are the primary key to positive intervention. It is not possible to speak of understanding without a *consideration of complexity and context*. It is never possible to speak of complexity and context without considering the *significance of relationships*. It is to the experience of relationships as it has arisen within this current research that this discussion now turns.

### **The significance of relationships**

Relationships weave in and out of daily experience. They cross the timeline of life. Some encounters are momentary while others are longstanding. Some are regarded in a negative fashion while still others are regarded as positive. Relationships in the lives of those engaged in SMSW are mercurial. They shift and change and this dynamic quality is what sparks an interest, not just in the relationships that emerge but also, in the ways that relationships are created and developed over time. No relationship is either totally good or impossibly bad, although there are exceptions. Whether good, bad, or variable, they are the place where those who engaged in SMSW experience stress and, yet paradoxically, also create their opportunities.

Several key themes are apparent about relationships. Age against background always seems to play a key role in how relationships develop and unfold. Age influences whether or not resilience and adaptation in the face of adversity is present in early adolescence, or absent until

adversity and experience awakens that capacity at a later stage in life. Age is a risk factor for negative outcomes from abusive relationships, but it is not always the case. When relationships—even sex work connections—contain certain qualities, age is less of a risk factor. Some of these qualities appear as: a capacity for conversation, an ability to think beyond personal need and therefore consider the *other*, adaptation and flexibility, and an ability to remain in the person's life and not retreat when conversation and availability is most required. For some of the participants, these qualities were present even in their sex work connections. Where this occurred, the difference and the positive impact were palpable.

In this study, the succession of examples is endless. Steph showed great care for a client who was disabled and unable to engage in sex. Brian set the limit that his clients were simply clients, but acknowledged that they showed care for him and knew him well. Jeffrey remembered the carer in the institution, even though he had not seen her for over 10 years. Adam remembered his first lover and boyfriend with whom he tried to create a life. Richard moved into sex work but recalled how, from the beginning, he tried to orchestrate that they care for him and hear his story. Nick found a client who shared his interest in cars and they shared no-sex-work times together as they travelled. Dennis made friends out of his clients and introduced them to his personal social scene. Relationships are never far from the sex work scene. The goals they have for other relationships—such as care, patience, respect, even passion and friendship—are replicated within the SMSW scene.

What a contextualised understanding of male sex work brings forth is the understanding that it all began with family and *family remains significant*. For young males engaged in street-based sex work, some relationships are perceived as negative, while others are viewed in a more positive manner. First and always, there are family relationships that, whether positive or negative, seem ever-present — even in their absence. Dominic was incredibly disappointed with his parents because of their awareness that he was being abused. Drake spoke of similar feelings as did Jeffrey and Jack. While not implying any direct causal connection between abuse and sex work,

the loss of protection within the home created a strong sensation of abandonment. For each of the participants who experienced such events, it was shocking and chaos inevitably accompanied the sense of psychosocial implosion. These complex familial events paved the way for new adventures away from family.

Leaving home was a consistent theme that emerged in the research in relation to family. While some left home of necessity, others chose to leave knowing that they could have remained, albeit in discomfort. Germaine left his family for the city because of burgeoning sexual identity but pined for better contact with his family. Steph had a similar story of psychosexual disconnection and yet he too remained in contact and periodically returned to his family. Nick idealised, and even idolised, his family often in an uncensored and unreflective manner. All of the participants thought about their family and continued to desire something of substance — no matter how small. For some, such as Dominic, there was a desire for reconciliation. For others, such as Germaine, it was the desire that things could, and should, have been different and better in the past. The crucial insight that we gain through the research is that all of the participants work at retaining family within their thinking, and sometimes within their actions.

James refused to speak of family, and he indicated that there were “no options” for him within his family when he was homeless at 17. And yet, there was nonetheless the admission, very late in the interview, that “there are a lot of people in my life that I have love for and they also have love for me” and they are “friends and some family” [9(355,359)]. What is crucial is that family remains within their thinking, even after negative events. It is a sensitive area that many of the participants did not want to explore. However, where connection with family occurred, it emerged, not through passivity but through active effort. These efforts were tentative and riddled with ambivalence but they nonetheless point to the significance of familial relationships. As I will indicate later in this chapter, this is an area that warrants further research.

*Mugs, mates and lovers* are key to any understanding of the experience of those who engage in street-based male sex work. Peers and friends come and go. Strangers enter and impact

or simply pass by. Clients are a constant wherever sex work is a part of life. Some interlocutors become close mates, partners or lovers. They exert a particular influence because of their proximity to the person. It is a dynamic and dialogical set of movements, with great complexity and import for the present and the future. Some relationships are quarantined from others, while at other times, and more often than not, there is a blurring of the boundaries between the different types of relationships. Dennis and Jules presented the clearest, but not the only, examples of this blurring process. They had family, friends and clients, and over time, there was a blurring of boundaries. Clients became friends and sometimes, but rarely, lovers.

Although it is not possible to provide a simple explanation for this blurring process that covers all participants, it does appear that at least some of the participants have a desire to have their worlds merge into a more congruent and less fractious totality. The drive to make friends out of clients was evident in Nick, Steph, Germaine, Dennis, Jason, Jeffrey, Brian and Jules. While they all sought to merge worlds in their own particular ways, there was nonetheless a level of consistency in the merging process for all of the participants. What drives the need and desire to merge worlds is what is critical at this point. If Taylor (1991) is correct in asserting that it is our conversations that make and form our humanity, then the drive to merge conversations may well be about the desire in each of the participants to develop congruence in the formation of their humanity. It is expected that family, mates and lovers should all form a critical part of this conversation. What is somewhat ironic is that mugs also form a part of the conversations that provide a pathway forward, a conversation of growth, and an experience of positive human development.

This capacity for relational adaptation—of the joining of people and the merging of conversations—unfolds at a variety of points in the narrative. Where a capacity for functional, emotional, and flexible conversation has been present in his early formation and life experience, this places him in a good position to be able to adapt, and find ways forward, under adverse conditions. By way of example, the acceptance by his family of his experimentation with sex

work at 15 allowed Jules to keep the totality of his experience within his family. This capacity for adaptation within his family indicated the presence of foundational values, experiences, rituals, and practices that helped Jules develop a positive sense of self. There was availability, sensitivity, expressions of care and nurturing, and the modelling of flexible and resilient responses. Foresight, a capacity for assessment, judgement and a capacity to think about, and reflect on, experience were the immediate and obvious consequences of these positive relational experiences. These are the skills that can effectively alter the course of their negative experiences. For Dennis, these skills were also present but in a diluted form. Home and family did not know about his sex work. However, there was enough strength and *simpatico* in familial and peer relations such that the desire to bring disparate threads together—to inform family and friends of involvement in sex work—was eventually translated into reality. This desire is reflective of self-driven/other-involved *capacity building*.

What we see in the research is a level of chaos coexisting with order, relationships that support and those that detract from positive development. What we also observe, in all its richness, is the mercurial nature of relationships. Relationships are good and bad, seen to be that way, often all at the same time. What academics and policy makers regard as abuse sometimes attracts a personal definition contrary to commonly held notions. Other events that are viewed as benign, by the outsider, are raised to new levels of understanding because a richness of experience bleeds through the text. In the end, what is most prominent in this research is the presence and experience of relationships, in all their richness and complexity.

I began, in this chapter, by examining the broader issues of complexity and context in the development of understanding. I then moved in closer to the person to consider the experience of relationships within that broader context, reflecting on the complexity of those relationships. I now move even closer, in fact to the internal world of the person, to the *sense of self* that underpins relating and action within the broader context of life.

## The experience of self

A consistent theme throughout the research has been the *experience of self*. Regardless of how it is examined, it is viewed by a number of the participants as a palpable if not tangible, yet hidden and ill-defined aspect of the person. They have a sense that there is a thing or entity that is somehow within them, that exists beyond their mere actions. It can never be reduced to the sum of their actions. It is larger and more encompassing than mere behaviour and it captures the essence of their being. They do not speak of it as spirit; nor is it external to them. It arises out of the *background* as a result of an internal dialogue between the person and their world (physical, social, psychological). It is within (Taylor, 1989, 1991, 1992).

The sense of self is most evident when it is under attack or after such events when they feel depleted and scattered within their emotions. It is most often described by the participants in terms of worth. Thus, self-worth is doubted and threatened—or supported—by relational encounters. It is considered as strong or under siege, medicated in order to survive, sustained or retrieved by aloneness, cleansed, in danger and defended, and finally, protected because of its importance. In thinking about the contribution of this present research to knowledge and practice, the consideration of self—as thought about and spoken of by the participants—is a significant point of discussion.

There are moments within the research where participants spoke of their sense of *self as being diminished by their life experience*. It is felt to be under siege, implying that it is being attacked by experiences over which the person has little or no control. Brian has the strongest expression of his sense of self under siege and it is associated with being at *The Wall*. Being jeered at, spat upon, and even the simple, yet exposing, act of standing, at night, in a public space that is associated with male “prostitution” is enough to cast an oppressive pall over his experience of self. A diminished sense of *self esteem* or *self worth* is what participants identify as a negative outcome arising from sex work at *The Wall*. And yet, for a time, Brian was unable to stop the experience of being under siege. Other more pressing needs—drugs, rent, and food—meant he remained at *The*

*Wall* knowing, at least in retrospect, that his sense of self was attacked by being there. Thus it is not just that the self is in jeopardy because of the negative experiences at *The Wall* such as being jeered at. A diminished sense of self can be attributed to such negative external experiences. However, there is another source for the diminishment of self — choices that are made by the person. Again, with Brian, the experience is stark and obvious. With some freedom, he chooses to use drugs and this has consequences at a most fundamental level. It is a choice that he recognises as destructive of self.

Other participants likewise reflect a similar connection between the experience of a diminishing sense of self and other life events that are located within the physical environment and in their relational world. These include, but are not restricted to, SMSW or MSW events. A significant number of the participants regarded family relationships—at one point or many—as a source of the experience of self being under siege. The rejection by his family of Germaine's sexuality was felt as a direct assault on his sense of self. It was an attack at a central part of his being at a time when this aspect of self was being awakened and therefore quite vulnerable. His response was to flee from the country for a place “that protects homosexuality” [25(67)]. This is an example of being (overtly) under siege and of the corresponding response — to head to a place where he understood that his sense of self would be protected and supported. Regardless of the naivety of his thinking, the desire and intent are clear. There is an overriding need to protect the sense of self from insult. Less overt experiences of being under siege are noted by a number of the participants. Dominic's sense that his parents must have known that he was abused was mirrored within Jack as well. The covert experience of abandonment—uncertain in origin and unaccompanied by words—was in some respects an experience more difficult to comprehend and respond to as there was only the felt sense of being under siege. It was the omission rather than the commission of negativity that was most threatening to the sense of self.

Of significance in this research are the responses—over time—of the participants to their quite individual experiences of *self under siege*. For some (such as Dennis and Jules), their

reaction was almost immediate — protective and resolute. They *cut away* from the experience and moved to another social or geographic position, thereby removing the threat that was located in a person or environment. For others, such as Malcolm, Brian and Richard (who were younger at the time), their response was far from proactive and they found themselves mired within negative experiences and under siege for some considerable time.

Sex, and not just sex work, is one of the key vehicles whereby the participants felt diminished in terms of their sense of self. Brian's *damaged sex* emerged from his experience of sex work but was not restricted to that forum. All sex was damaged and so was his sense of self. Sexual intimacy—even with oneself—and a *damaged sense of self* are, for Brian, inextricably connected. In totality, he felt himself to be a damaged person because of his engagement in male sex work. Thus discrete forms of behaviour—connected as they are to a larger personal context—impact on the sense of self, in both a positive and negative fashion. While Germaine saw himself as being good at sex work, it was something he *had to do* in order to survive. That said, he felt overwhelmed by the sex work experiences that seemed to get out of control. This had a great impact on his sense of self and wellbeing. Richard, Malcolm, Damien, and Peter all spoke in similar terms. Again, age was a factor in whether the sense of self was attacked by the experience of SMSW. Age influenced the person's capacity to craft events and ultimately influence the formation and experience of self. That said, the damage resulting from negative experiences of sex work is not simply reducible to these events occurring at a tender age. Other factors are at play and the sense of self is affected by the entire context.

Notable in SMSW was the experience of others who (partly) enjoyed their sex work experience. While it did not *inflate* their sense of self, as James put it, it also did not detract from their sense of self. In this situation, sex work was used for a variety of positive experiences that did not appear to debilitate the person's sense of self. Among these positive experiences were the gaining of a good income, sexual experimentation, and the development of positive friendships. Where Dominic, Germaine and Brian struggled to gain control over the experience, the turning

point in relation to self for James, Jules and Dennis was their ability to control and fashion—at least in part—their experience of sex work. The degree to which the sex work may be crafted influences—at least to some extent—the way that sex work impacts on the sense of self.

Those who could not exercise control over their environment and therefore their practices inevitably existed under siege. Some of the participants viewed substance use as a method whereby they could protect their sense of self within the context of being under siege. This occurred even though they also understood that substance use inevitably exacerbated their loss of control. For Brian, substance use allowed him to detach himself from the environment, the people and the experiences that caused concern and were viewed as damaging. SMSW was viewed by him as one of those experiences that caused grief and alarm. Substance use was a method whereby the stress associated with being under siege was alleviated. Yet substance use, even as a medicating factor in the sense of self, was not always seen in negative terms. For Dennis it lubricated the social environment and added to the experience of sex and friendship gained through sex work. The same could be said for Nathan who travelled with and on *speed* (methamphetamine) in the development of a friendship gained through sex work. Like their relationships, the medicated self was a mercurial entity, even harder to define or understand because of the presence of substances. For those embroiled in substance use and sex work, the sense of self appears to be subjugated and naively affirmed by substance use. It is a *medicated sense of self* that emerges. It is far from being in touch with experience and emotion and it is a fine line between a relatively benign use of substances and a progressive disaster that overwhelms life and the person's sense of self.

Another approach used by a number of the participants for the sustaining of a sense of self was the *experience of solitude*. This appeared in two ways within the narratives. First, it was a reaction to negative experiences where solitude began as a flight from negativity. Brian achieved this after he became exhausted with sex work at *The Wall* and simply wanted to be alone. Within that aloneness, he cleansed himself through masturbation and felt restored by releasing the sex

work experience that occupied his body. Some semblance of a sense of self was restored in his private domain and without the involvement of commerce. Notwithstanding the positivity in this private encounter, guilt and doubt nonetheless ravaged his restorative efforts and left even this private space contaminated by negativity. Again, the sense of self that was maimed through “damaged sex” was not able to be reinvigorated through a difference sexual experience, though solitude provided some respite in which it was possible to experience some recovery.

Others also experienced aloneness as a way to retrieve a sense of self. James lived alone, created clear boundaries for solitude, and sought intimacy when he needed it, and only when he was able to tolerate contact with others. He preferred solitude to being with others. Having said that, he also talked of times when there had been a cohabiting *boyfriend*. This only occurred when he was not engaged in sex work. Sex work consumed his capacity for intimacy and solitude was the respite.

Other participants gained—or regained—a sense of self by being with another person. But again, this could not occur when sex work was present. Jack ceased sex work and was able to strike up a relationship with another man who likewise engaged in a form of sex work. However, his partner’s sex work was a threat to their relationship and to his sense of self. Whenever sex work was a part of their relationship, there was the prospect that his sense of self could easily be shaken. *Others* are significant in the sustaining of a sense of self. Sex work affects the sense of self. It also affects the capacity of a person to gain, enhance, or maintain a sense of self. This is a common theme for many of the participants. Again, and as mentioned earlier, a critical direction for future research will be the investigation of the sex work experience from the perspective of family and partners, peers and friends. These are the people who accompany—knowingly or unknowingly—the young male through their sex work experience. In the case of SMSW, this necessarily includes *the experience of danger*, which also markedly influences the person’s sense of self.

On the street and in private residences, danger lurks as an unknown element of daily life. Ultimately, it is an un-assessable threat, regardless of the skill of the person engaged in sex work. Some of the participants are very aware of this potential threat to physical safety and the ability this has to corrupt their sense of self. Others are less aware, and this lack of awareness opens up the possibility of harm to self at a variety of levels. As a young person of 14, Richard was exposed to potential threat when he entered a car and was driven to places of which he had no knowledge. While no physical harm came to him, he was depleted at a psychological level by the experience. It left him feeling vulnerable and with a strong sense of self-loathing. The sense of self is significantly affected by even the most subtle of psychological assaults, and given his age, this loss of control, and the presence of potential danger, was a significant threat to Richard's sense of self. James, on the other hand, was aware of danger but nonetheless invited men into his home after a limited assessment carried out on the street. While this was an acceptable risk for him, he recounts one occasion when the risk was miscalculated, the client caused alarm and James was forced to defend himself. Being older, and knowledgeable in respect of his experience of self, James had no hesitation of forcibly protecting himself, even at the cost of some harm being done to another person.

Again, age is a critical factor in the protection and defence of self, even where the risk is ever-present, but it is not just about age. It is what comes with age — knowledge and experience of self, and an understanding about what results from a depleted sense of self. The protection of self, while immediately physical, is very much about the protection of psychological integrity. This was difficult even where the participant was older, more astute and apparently capable of and willing to physically defend self (e.g., James). It appeared as almost impossible where youthfulness—and all that goes with the context of youthfulness—was a factor (e.g., Richard and Malcolm).

One of the contributions of this research is that it has brought to the fore the complex ways that each of the participants considered and dealt with their experience of self. The social

ecology of the person is critical in the formation of a sense of self. Where this is dominated by negativity or destructive elements, the sense of coherence in the self is greatly diminished. Over time, this body of negative experiences forms a vast, unspoken, largely inchoate body of experience that is formative of self in an ongoing manner. It impacts on the person's capacity for positive development. This was evident in Dominic although it was the opposite for Jules. What we see in this research is how the participants experience this dynamic and contextualised process of self-formation and self-sustenance through practices that are dominantly relational. The contribution of the research is in the unfolding of the silent internal dialogues about self-within-context. It is also about the subtle nuances evident in the way each person thinks about self, and how these dynamic processes are essentially interrelated. It is difficult, and perhaps impossible, to approach any understanding of the person within the phenomenon of street-based male sex work without an understanding of this complex process that focuses on the developing and sustaining of a contextualised sense of self.

### **The abiding place of education**

Common belief separates those involved in SMSW from the experience of education and expects the two to be held in irresolvable conflict. However, education is present, enjoyed and hated, valued and scorned, sometimes all at the same time. As I have indicated in the previous section, this current research outlines, in stark detail, the narratives that reveal complex intersecting social relationships, within the person, and between individuals and with social systems. In this research, we also learn about the significance of the *content*, *structure*, and *people* within the experience of education, even for those engaged in SMSW.

Key educational themes and strategies employed by those engaged in SMSW have been outlined in this research. Education has a capacity to protect against adversity, sometimes when other social experiences (such as family and friends) cannot or will not. This occurs on a variety of fronts within the educational experience. The *content* of education is important but so are the

*structures* and the *people*. These are the three elements where connectivity is evident and resilience emerges. Drake spoke of his encounter with a teacher whose appearance and manner was striking. The positive aspects of the encounter with education were captured within a teaching style, a rhythmic structure that engaged Drake, and the content that he found engaging. Benefits also emerge through the structure inherent within the institution of education. When he felt particularly oppressed by the abuse at home, he escaped to the library. These were the resources and the structure that contained his anxiety and provided him with a way to cope with the suffering at home. He read and then reframed his abuse experiences using literature as the vehicle for his reframing. He gained sustenance for his developing self, which was fragmented by other people and environments that were less amicable to his needs.

However, the teachers, the content and the institution are not the only containing influences within the educational experience. It was also the school counsellor who was concerned with Drake's emotions and wellbeing. She guided him towards understanding. Other participants likewise experienced the usefulness of counselling in the sustaining of self and the containing of anxiety. Like Drake, Nick took his sexual abuse to his school counsellor and gained insight into questions of morality. Brian took his sex work experience to a counsellor within an alternative form of education, who then sought out another person with whom he could speak. His experience was one of connection, relief and support. Education broadened his horizon and expanded his web of positive connections. These are vibrant memories and protective experiences that galvanised him towards a resilient stance in life.

*Education can fail.* When this happened, it was invariably because the content and process of education did not match the participant. It also occurred when the core people embedded within the educational experience—students and teachers alike—had little regard for, or understanding of, personal context and difference. Schools can be harsh, cruel and unforgiving places, especially for those who are “different”. This was notably so for those struggling with sexual identity. Nathan's story is archetypal of such isolating situations. Perceived as different, he

was persecuted by his fellow students and dismissed by teachers when he complained. And yet against such negative educational experiences, and within the context of his mother's death, he was able to craft the completion of his school education and the beginning of a time at university. While it is not easily defined, measured or causally explained, the narrative of Nathan's survival within a barren and hostile educational environment is a key contribution of this research. In this saga, one central element was his resistance to harm and belittlement. In Nathan's situation, it was this resistance, and his avoidance of *giving in* to peer-pressure and abuse, that facilitated his survival, notwithstanding the psychosocial damage it did to him. However, this negative educational experience cannot be viewed in isolation. Nathan knew that there was another story and a bigger picture. His former school *was* supportive and encouraging. It was this alternative educational encounter that allowed him to maintain a level of perspective that encouraged, perhaps even facilitated, resistance.

There are *limits to the capacity for adaptation in the face of adversity*. Where those limits are located is highly dependent on the individual, his past experience and the environmental factors which are influential at any given time. Prior to working at *The Wall*, Nathan studied nursing at university but left after his first year, in an alcoholic stupor. He headed for Sydney, became destitute, worked *The Wall* and at some point became HIV positive. Notwithstanding the experiences that were set against the development of resistance and resilience, at the time of the interview, the education that he lost was the education he still craved. It remained active as a focal point for change and development.

This points to and affirms the unpredictable nature of resilience and the individual nature of the interactive experiences that protect and deplete. It also highlights the abiding place that education can hold in the formation of positive thinking about the present and the future. There was at least one good experience of education and this allowed Nathan to explore that which was core to his being — his sexuality. This positive context of exploration contributed to

the development of resilience as it also allowed him to sustain a longstanding view that education could be a positive experience and was therefore inherently good.

There are other narratives within this research that speak of the role of friendship gained within the context of education. Adam was isolated at one school but when he moved to another school, this opened up the possibility of a better educational experience that was largely connected with peer relationships. Through his intimate relationship with Josh, he sustained an interest in education, was accepted into a peer group, found alternative housing with Josh's family, and developed a positive and loving intimate relationship. While such encounters are not the aim of any school, education is a primary forum for peer-relationships and when this works, the outcomes are likewise positive.

Notwithstanding the adversity sometimes experienced within the school environment, the inherent value of education is rarely lost on the person engaged in SMSW. Where it is a positive experience, education can be a source of friendship, support, focus, intimacy and pleasure. It has the capacity to stimulate thoughts of a future and to act as a fulcrum for resistance and resilience. Whether positive or negative, initial educational experiences and social expectations drive an ongoing dialogue with the idea and experience of education. It is in the common social discourse and it permeates the conversations of those who engage in SMSW.

### **Thinking about intervention**

A common feature in the narratives of the participants was that they each sought, to a greater or lesser extent, to be engaged with adults. Whether external to family and sex work or within the experience itself, there was a seeking out of people who might be able to converse with them and support their efforts at change and development. Even those who appeared most resilient—as evidenced by their individual achievements—sought involvement with others. This was in order that their aspirations could be discussed and supported. If for no other reason, this

gives cause to think about the issue of *intervention*. While intervention can be thought of across numerous inter-related layers, the key areas in my consideration are those areas touched upon within the present narratives — *family, friends and the social environment*, and *health, welfare and education*.

### **Family, friends and the social environment**

In combination with the literature around resilience, the insights drawn from the narratives in this work are the place to begin thinking about intervention within the context of family, friends and the social environment. Masten and Reed (2002) and others (Bell, 2001; Nightingale & Fischhoff, 2002; Resnick et al., 1997) define resilience, and consider the capacity for adaptation in the face of adversity, as a mark of the presence of resilience in *at risk* children and adolescents. Masten and Reed (2002) formulate a framework for thinking about intervention. It includes three sets of strategies that follow the lines spoken of in my earlier consideration of resilience. The first set of strategies is *risk-focussed* and aims to reduce exposure to “hazardous experiences”. A second set of strategies is *asset-focussed*. These aim to increase the quality of, and access to, resources “for the development of competence”. The final set of strategies is *process-focussed*. They aim to “mobilize the fundamental protective systems for development” (p. 84-85).

Consideration will now be given to these strategic approaches in relation to *family, friends and the social environment*. Reducing some risks within a given environment will be achieved by a combined and interrelated approach that increases assets and improves processes. Therefore, consideration of *risk, asset, and process* will be achieved as they occur in reality — intermingled and in a complementary fashion.

*Early intervention* with young males who run the risk of becoming homeless (with all that it implies) is a far better and easier option than waiting until chaos reigns in the person’s life and his capacity for adaptation is prematurely put to the test. While it is clear in the literature that there are a range of factors that contribute, in various ways, to the person finding his way to *The*

*Wall*, the task of *preventing homelessness* is a key risk-reduction strategy as homelessness is the clearest pathway to *The Wall*. This may not be the pathway towards prostitution in other forms of male sex work but it is a dominant and common pathway in street-based male sex work.

Reducing the risk of homelessness means that we must act to prevent the *causes of homelessness*. Given that the causes are multiple, complex and interrelated, such strategies must be aligned with this reality. In the first instance, *reducing familial conflict* is a key (process) strategy. Early intervention that prevents or alleviates the level of conflict—or reduces the irresolvable nature of conflict—is a significant intervention strategy. In order to achieve such an end, two approaches are required. The first is to offer a level of intervention that assists with the conflict—within the family as a whole—as and when it occurs. This tackles the immediate risk and can assist in the prevention of running. The second is a more general or universal health strategy that increases the understanding of conflict. This means exploring the processes that cause and alleviate conflict. And this must occur within both parents and children as a population group. This is about capacity (or asset) building. The first strategy is *clinical intervention*, the second strategy is about *psycho-educational capacity building*. I will consider both of these issues again throughout this section of the chapter and in the next where I consider agencies that can or may intervene. Regardless of the *psycho-educational strategies* that are implemented, conflict is a part of life. The critical issue is less the prevention of conflict and more the *repair of any rupture that results from conflict* (Lewis, 2000). This is a more sophisticated psychosocial health strategy than that of using prevention alone or in isolation. Prevention can too easily be seen as simplistic, too late, or beyond the capacity of many (if not all) individuals and families. *Prevention* must accompany an approach that emphasises *repair*. In reality, one cannot exist without the other.

Education and support of parents must be a primary strategy. It is in this strategy that we aim to increase the *capacity* of parents to support and retain contact with children, and to deal with life's dramas as they arise. We do this by increasing their understanding, at a thinking level, by providing information that assists them to understand developmental processes and

behavioural changes. By way of example, had Nathan's family been able to comprehend and discuss his burgeoning sexual identity, and had the family been supported to rally around when life at school was difficult, then his life direction may have been different because the message given to him by his family would have been — *stick with us, we can work this out!* It is an approach that aims at *keeping people together* (asset-building) and *in conversation* (process-enhancing) with the corresponding *avoidance of premature and simplistic solutions* that increase exposure (risk-reduction) such as leaving home or breaking up a family.

Risks to healthy development can arise through two different areas of exposure for those who eventually engage in SMSW. First, risk emerges through heightened difficulties within the family. Second, risk occurs through exposure to external factors that contain potential harm. For those who have engaged in street-based sex work, the primary and initial risk comes often through a collapse of a primary situation of care. The pathway to SMSW is paved with risks beginning with the absence or fragmentation of early care and progressing to the risks of association. Although it may seem remote from the experience of SMSW, early care at an emotional and physical level is of significance because attachment is of significance. The process of *repair after rupture*, so important in adolescence development, cannot occur without a longitudinal bond that speaks of positive experiences of attachment. Many of the narratives within this research speak of moments in early childhood where detachment occurred and this was marked as significant. The development of positive family-based emotional assets, and the development and experience of positive and adaptive relating, are significant interventions within the family context.

One of the heightened risks to family that is not immediately person-related but certainly has person-related impacts is that of *poverty*. Some young people within this study left home because of the inability of the family, as a unit, to provide basic support. While part of this inability was emotional, a financial threat, or even collapse, applies pressure to the young male who may then consider himself a burden on the family. Flight from home can occur because of

poverty — emotional and financial. A practical but difficult element of intervention must be the eradication, or at least reduction, of poverty so that a *flight from poverty* does not force the young male beyond the family and into a situation where he must prematurely provide for himself. While families do remain intact even where poverty is a major issues, it does present as a significant risk. Premature exposure and premature responsibility increase risk.

A critical aspect of the development of resilience within the life of the adolescent is the presence of friends and the presence of an engaging community in which the person can grow and develop. While these avenues are held to be healthy and supportive, great care must also be exercised as peers and activities within the community can also be places and encounters of heightened risk. However, friends and the community are the *primary psychosocial assets*, external to the family, within the life of each person. Each of the participants who left their family and headed for the red-light district of Sydney, upon their arrival in that foreign place, first sought out peers with whom they could develop friendships. This is an indicative moment and one that says as much about the general drive within each person as it does about immediate need.

One of the key features in the narratives was that there was a *lack of understanding* within the person's world — at home and within their respective peer groups. For Brian, home was not riddled with conflict such that he could not survive there. Although it was an uncomfortable place because he could not be heard, the determining sense of conflict came through his contact with *peers who did not understand* and did not welcome. Even more, they ridiculed him for involvement with religion. The search for new friends was what drove his movement away from home. Homelessness was not the desired outcome — friendship was. If *capacity building within the social environment*—within and beyond the family—can occur, be enhanced and strengthened, then risk can be diminished because the threat to stability and contact with primary care is also diminished. The accumulation of assets is not about wealth but, rather, about the *psychosocial connections* that bind the members of a family and a community, particularly at moments of stress. Strengthening a circle of friends is a proactive way to strengthen the individual.

It is relatively easy to consider how to intervene within a family, either in a preventative manner or at a point of crisis. Intervening with peers and friends is, in some respects, a much more complicated process. And yet, if such intervention does not occur, exposure to risk of harm is heightened and potential assets that can be supportive of positive development are diminished or squandered. Intervention needs to occur via the organisations to which peers and friends have access. Utilising such agencies as a starting point is based on the experience of the participants in this current study. However, access to them, while difficult to achieve within a marginalised population, is not the only issue. While building strength and notions of openness to diversity within a friendship group are clear messages, how they are couched and experienced by young people is a difficult problem to solve. There are no fixed solutions in this area. However, what we gain from the present narratives is that intervention must be culturally-based and sensitive to the individual, otherwise, availability to ideas and intervention is unwelcome and not sought (Howerton et al., 2007). Friends are critical to psychosocial survival. They are *primary assets* that need *careful attention and practical support* if they are to retain their efficacy. While I have focussed on individuals and families, attention must also be given to those agencies to which individuals and families do or could seek access: health, welfare and education.

### **Health, welfare and education**

As indicated earlier in this chapter, young males and their families are not the only groups that require consideration in respect of intervention. They are not the only ones with whom young people make contact, before, during or after they have left home. While Richard was introduced to SMSW at *The Wall* via a friend, he was also introduced, by that same person, to *welfare and health services*. Along with their *peers* and *education*, these are the principle institutional catchment points for marginalised adolescents outside of family. Beyond simply saying that they should or must intervene, consideration must be given to how these agencies, institutions and

services can improve their approaches so that marginalised young males, who are vulnerable, may be better supported.

Nathan and Brian both felt significant rejection within their primary social networks. What made it an impossible situation was that neither their family nor their social networks noted or understood or acted on the rejection experiences. This failure of omission ultimately brought about a systemic failure for both boys within the essential system of education. Had there been preventative education and training for teachers that focussed on a comprehensive understanding of *difference*, the *power of rejection* and the *psychosocial calamity* that can result from discrimination, then the rejection experienced by these two boys may not have occurred. Again, it is about education and intervention with families and with social institutions that aims at reducing the *risk* of exposure to harm. This occurs, in part, by increasing awareness, knowledge and capacity within key institutions.

In Australia, and perhaps equally in other countries, the demand on social institutions such as medical services, social service agencies, and schools, never appears to abate. Within such a high-demand-inadequate-supply scenario, priorities are keenly contested and those who are largely voiceless, or are difficult to service, invariably receive less or limited attention. Those engaged in SMSW fall into that equation as a disparate group who are difficult to reach and service. However before they reached *The Wall*, they were in education. As a social institution, education can sometimes be the last bastion before they disappear into homelessness and substantive marginalisation. I have already discussed the significance of education, even for those whose participation ceased when they were as young as 12. What the narratives of this research indicate is the clear *capacity* of education to be a force for good in their lives. However, what they also speak of is the inability of some elements of education to be open to difference and diversity. While individual teachers and counsellors exemplify awareness and compassion, it is the overall culture within the education unit or system that can be problematic. It is difficult for schools to cope with children who react to their poor (out of school) environment with anxiety, distress and

troublesome behaviour (within school). What complicates this reality is when schools, sometimes unknowingly, further isolate and marginalise an already desperate adolescent. A school's practical and often passive discrimination on the grounds of sexual identity difference is a classic example.

Much of the emphasis in school support has been on enhancing the skill-base of teachers and counsellors in respect of these issues of concern. However, all this is for nothing if the culture of the institution is not supportive of children and adolescents whose lives may well be chaotic beyond the walls of the school. Impacting on the culture of the institution means enacting gradual and consistent changes to ethos and structures. Education tries, at times, to quarantine itself from what it regards as social problems, indicating that its focus must be on curricula. Yet, as each student enters the school, he or she brings to that entry all of the drama and disadvantage that may ultimately see their lives unravel outside the school. This is the stuff that contaminates their entry into, and participation in, school each day.

Shifting the culture in an institution is not an easy task. Part of that task lies in the education of staff. However, there are macro tasks that require attention if a school is, over time, to shift the emphasis so that the wellbeing of the student stands on equal footing to their educational achievement. This is a long term project that every institution—be it health, welfare or education—must strive to achieve. The starting point for this shift of emphasis is in the training of the practitioners in each of those institutions. It is a process of enculturation that must begin with their first university lectures and continue through their induction as practitioners and be regularly attended to in the ongoing support they receive while in practice. A second key feature of cultural change must be the support of senior staff. The aim is to heighten their awareness of marginalisation so this impacts on the way they view fiscal responsibility and planning within the institution. It must also impact on the outcomes they demand from their practitioners.

Dealing with marginalisation through training and ongoing support of practitioners must occur if cultural shifts are to occur. This must include initial and ongoing training on issues

of marginalisation. In the appropriate settings, it must also include clinical supervision, peer review exercises, strategic appraisal of practice and policies, and ongoing access by staff to research and publications. It is a process of shifting the culture, on both a horizontal and vertical plane, within the institution. It demands resource allocation if marginalised population groups are to be recognised, supported and protected from neglect and discrimination.

As an indicator of what the new ethos must be, two strategies appear of paramount significance. Intervention with those engaged in SMSW will always require a focus on the basics of human survival — personal health and safety, food, shelter, education, and other pathways forward. If these are couched only in outcome-oriented relationships, devoid of emotion, the pragmatics of those relationships will run the risk of negating the message that is seen to be the purpose of the intervention. In other words, the health, welfare or education *message will be lost if the conversation is not couched within a relationship that matters*. The vehicle for delivering the message is perhaps of greater significance to a marginalised adolescent or young adult than the message itself.

As indicated earlier in this chapter, health messages are held within a context. As Steph noted about the health clinic, “it’s free” and “I have got a good doctor”. Beyond the free health care, his doctor is “a good counsellor”. Rather than ignoring the issues of significance to Steph, he “talks about” the issues that matter and he “explains everything”. The conclusion is that “he’s good”. Steph can identify with him because he has “big ring hanging out of his nose” [13(351-359)]. While it would be banal to focus simply on the physical elements of this equation, the message is that the doctor is helpful because he connects at a range of levels and not simply at the level of diagnosis. Drake’s teacher took him “on journeys all the time” [6(108)] through his teaching. Nick’s school counsellor explained what was right and wrong in adult behaviour. These people are emotionally available and they connect at a real level with the stuff that is at the core of the young male’s life. Disengaged from a relationship that is deemed of significance, health messages and protective behaviours will count for little in the fight to help those engaged in

SMSW. While the message is important, the quality of the messenger is imperative; otherwise the message will not be heard.

A second key strategy is implied by the first. While we train and educate those who intervene around the issues of SMSW and life on the street, we fail to inculcate within their practice base, the *all-important capacity to relate with a level of emotion, tenderness and care that engages with the person at the level that matters to him in his life*. The narratives are specific in this area. By way of example, for Drake and Jeffrey, both of whom endured great adversity, the relationships that mattered most, and to which they remain attached, both in relational process and content terms, were the ones that broke the mould of intervention. They offered significant emotion and tenderness and really provided the platform for reparative action in respect of relationship-building (Lewis, 2000). What is most significant to note is that the lessons contained within those relationships appear to remain of significance, years after they were first received. The power of their memory, of positive and instructive encounters, tells the story for those engaged in SMSW. *Relationships matter. They are the crucible for adaptation and resilience in life.*

### **The assessing person in SMSW**

In terms of strategies that are employed by the participants, those engaged in SMSW share one common goal. The narratives point to the importance attached to seeking out close, supportive and enduring relationships that guard and protect, nurture and support. It is a desire and quest found alive and active in all of the participants, regardless of their background experience. What is imperative to understand is the process by which each person sets about finding such key relationships. Second, it is also important to understand what each person does once this desired entity is discovered or not, found or lost. Whatever the outcome, the strategy is clear and the desire perennial. However, the strategy is fraught when applied without other skills and capacities, particularly that of assessment.

Assessment is the critical relational tool. As it is embedded in their key strategy—seeking relationships—so must education around this strategy be one of our key interventions. It matters little whether this is carried out through the home or social institutions such as sporting teams and clubs or whether in education, health or welfare. The development of assessment skills is an intervention strategy of great import. As those engaged in SMSW often leave home prematurely and that home is also often less than supportive of growth and development, they inevitably leave without a capacity for self-protection. The capacity to engage the world with insight and strategic assessment skills is of fundamental significance. For the young male who enters into SMSW, this lack of capacity undermines their natural and quite legitimate desire for support. It places them in an environment where the people whom they meet—potential clients in sex work, drug dealers, peers—may well desire their company, but only for opportunistic self-interest rather than altruistic reasons. This is a major point of vulnerability, and education around assessment and negotiation in street-life is a critical intervention that requires attention wherever the marginalised young male is present.

I began this dissertation noting that the SMSW world attracts little attention at an academic, education, health, or welfare level. Yet it is clear that it is a world that cries out through the text for such attention. Notwithstanding the comments made in this brief discussion, the question will always remain as to how people should intervene in this world. Some attention has been paid to galvanising knowledge about the SMSW experience and this must continue. Efforts have been brought to bear in some arenas specifically in response to the needs of family and friends. Consideration has also been given to the health, education and welfare needs of males engaged in SMSW. However, the area that commands greatest attention throughout the narratives is that of the relational needs and experience of those engaged in SMSW.

The literature around resilience, while diverse and complex, does formulate some clear ideas of what builds capacity in the face of adversity. While those engaged in SMSW need information, health and welfare services, opportunities and pathways that offer alternatives and

possibilities, it is the peopled-experiences that they crave and hunger for. While reminiscing on the good times and the life-events that have helped, it is the connections that matter that appear to have influenced outcomes more than any other efforts that have been brought to bear. Intervention efforts worked when they occurred within the context of a relationship of significance. This is the vehicle of intervention that requires most attention.

### **About the research methodology**

This was a complex research project, not just because of the nature of the issues being approached or the physical location of the participants. While there was a delineated beginning to this project, once begun, there was no clear-cut end in sight. For the majority of the participants, there was no simple “goodbye and thank you”. It was more like, “goodbye, thanks and see you tomorrow”. This reality had a profound effect on the researcher and the research, as I imagine was also the case for each of the participants. Help with housing, referral for a job, assistance with social security benefits, ongoing reassurance; these were some of the post-interview experiences that necessarily impacted on the thinking of the researcher and the life of the participant.

Two brief stories that appear in detail in Appendix 2 of this dissertation shed light on the ongoing nature of this *interview and reflection process*. Brian was 20 when he was first interviewed for this project. The interview occurred very early in the research program. He terminated the interview after one hour. He felt overwhelmed by his disclosures. He reassured me that he was not finished and wanted to return and “complete his” interview. Just under two years later, he did return and requested a second interview. I had seen him almost every week between the two interviews but the subject of the research was never mentioned by me or Brian. We completed the second interview and maintained sporadic contact. Some two years after the second interview, Brian returned to the research project and wanted to read his transcripts. He sat alone

and read, with me working away in the adjoining office. He was moving towards entering a rehabilitation program and indicated that he wanted to have a sense of where he had been and what he had done in his life. I had become his biographer and the narrative we had co-created and recorded became a lynchpin for his thinking about the future. Some weeks later he entered the country residential program some 6 hours drive west of Sydney. He telephones occasionally to speak with his counsellor, and passes on his regards through her to me.

The co-creation of narrative and the significance of the biographical process was nowhere more significant than with Nathan. He was the young man raised in the country, ridiculed at school, and who left university after first year and headed for the city. In the latter part of the research, his health became progressively more compromised because of AIDS and the resultant increase in opportunistic infections. He developed tuberculosis on the brain and suffered significant loss to his long term memory. He no longer remembered the interview, or very much about his life, but was and is aware that our research work together captured very personal tales and recollection to which he has ongoing access. This narrative—his biographical statement—provided some form of anchor at a time when personal crises were ever-apparent legacies of his life.

Of course, there are consequences that arise through the use of this methodology and these must be considered, and suggestions made regarding method. Within a grounded theory approach where prior contact has occurred, and emotions and psychodynamics are evident within the research material, a reflexive thread presents as an essential element to the methodology. There can be no pretence that you can do such research and remain detached or at a distance. Bracketing out is not feasible. The incorporation of a radical level of reflexivity has been critical to this study. While the material that results from this radical reflexivity is not text or narrative that is used in the *analysis*, it is imperative as a tool in understanding the interaction between the researcher and the text. Thus, it has involved acknowledging and utilising my reactions. I would suggest that this is a critical element within any study that considers powerful

emotions, psychosocial experiences, and relationships, where intimacy, desire and need are key elements.

There are dangers in this type of research. Participants have been anxious and, at times, drug affected. The geographic landscape of this research is also potentially hazardous to the researcher. The participants have many needs and on numerous occasions, the approach I took as an interviewer elicited more information than I was accustomed to receiving in therapeutic interviews. I became aware during the research that even though I did not believe that I had a conscious agenda as a therapist or counsellor it was nonetheless present and active. When I was able to suspend the therapeutic process and allow the participant to drive the research interview in a direction he desired—as occurred within the research interviews—I lost control of the process, and that control was given to the participant. In that movement, the participant felt enlivened by both the experience of control and the willingness of the interviewer to listen and follow. For some of the participants, in the experience of narrative liberation, a therapeutic attraction emerged and the participant experienced a desire to maintain intense contact that wasn't limited by the boundaries usually associated with research or a therapeutic process. Good clinical and research supervision is required for such a potentially highly-charged set of encounters. This is particularly the case if the researcher is new to a field of inquiry that is bound to be imbued with emotional and psychosexual intensity.

Such reflections raise the issue of what I would do differently given what I now know at the conclusion of the research process. My thoughts in this area fall into two broad categories: content and process, and both are interrelated. There were some issues that simply slipped by in the rush of words that is the research interview. Paradoxically, sexual identity was one concept that emerged as significant for the participants. How they perceived their sexual identity radically affected their experience of sex work. However, it was only late in the research interview process that it dawned on me how profound an issue this was for *all* of the participants. Why that did not occur to me has more to do with my own bias and unresolved issues than their ability to express

it as an issue. It was there but I simply did not see it until late in the interview process. By then, some 10 younger participants had mentioned it, but I had missed the opportunity to explore this more fully with them. In future research, I would have interviews read by a reflective team of fellow researchers in an effort to tease out the issues and interpretations that I had lost in the interview moment. There were, no doubt, other issues that I missed or gave only cursory attention and other perspectives on the interviews would provide greater depth to the analysis.

I interviewed Brian on a number of occasions with years in between each interview. This longevity gave a wonderful depth to the interviews with him and increased his and my understanding of his complex experiences. I—and he—understood the meaning within his experience far more because of the multiple interviews and the time between each interview. Depth of meaning is what was sought in the research. Longevity of contact and multiple interviews alter the first moments of contact and the information gained—and this may be a disadvantage—but what is lost through multiple points of reflection is overwhelmed by the depth and intensity of meaning that is gained over many years of contact. In future research, I would try and utilise a longitudinal approach with as many participants as possible. This would involve carrying out multiple interviews with as many of the participants as possible. I recognise that this may be problematic because SMSW is a transitional activity and not one that a person engages in over a lengthy period. I also recognise that those who engage in SMSW are often themselves in transition. That said, and as indicated in Appendix 2, my contact with Brian and others shows that where rapport is established, it is possible to maintain contact with participants over a lengthy period.

Those engaged in SMSW talk endlessly about others. Some they hate and loathe; others they admire, love, and grieve for. In terms of any future research process, I think it would be useful to engage with those of whom they speak. I had one brief experience of this within the current research. Jules spoke of his girlfriend during the first interview and she attended, at his request, for the entirety of the second interview. While she commented on his ideas, I did not

interview her or engage with her ideas, beyond noting them. Interviewing those with whom the young male engages would bring to the research arena, another layer of knowledge about SMSW. To name but a few areas of possible knowledge, it is imperative to understand: the other person's understanding of the young male's life prior to his involvement in sex work, his or her view of the young male's personal history, what it means to relate to a person engaged in SMSW, the young male's encounters in and outside male sex work. Through speaking with the young male engaged in SMSW, I gained an understanding of the experience from one angle. However, male sex work is not a singular act or a series of isolated events lived out only by the person engaged in SMSW. It is a contextualised phenomenon that involves myriad people and events that also give meaning and provide an understanding of SMSW. To understand SMSW, it is imperative that we explore the contextual (peopled) environment inhabited by the person engaged in male sex work. It is here that we discover another type of knowledge: that gained by being a part of, but not engaged in, the phenomenon of SMSW. Again, if relationships are critical in this area and human beings are indeed constituted in conversation, then a research process that allows for a dialogical process with more than just the person engaged in SMS, would be a useful aspect of any future research method.

Finally, young males who work *The Wall* do relate to each other both at *The Wall* and elsewhere. Sometimes, and when clients request it, they do sex work with each other as a *double act*. This current research has not been privy to the conversations that transpire between the young males who work *The Wall*. A variant form of focus group process may be useful in teasing out both the individual experiences of the young males, their thoughts and feelings about each other, their thoughts about each other's experiences in SMSW, while also allowing for the researcher to engage in an observational process that provides information on the way those engaged in SMSW engage with each other. What would emerge from such a process is a form of comparative knowledge. The research could explore what they have in common, what the differences are in terms of their experience of SMSW, and their reflections they have on the

similarities and differences they experience in SMSW. It is one thing for me as a researcher to note the differences that I see emerging throughout the interviews. It is a completely different research endeavour to record the comparisons made of the SMSW experience as noted by those engaged in SMSW within the context of a focus group. It is a dialogical approach that would produce a vibrant and very different form of collective knowledge on SMSW. Such a focus group, while difficult to organise and demanding for a researcher, would provide rich textual, co-created, and observational data about the milieu of street-based male sex work.

### **Limitations of the research and future directions**

While the strength of this study lay in the rich descriptions provided by the participants of their lives, their relationships and their experience of education, it was nonetheless a study set in time and within a historico-social context. The research was initiated soon after an extensive public commission of inquiry was held into police corruption. Male sex work was a special sub-inquiry within that commission of inquiry. As such, the inquiry focussed significant attention on *The Wall*, those engaged in SMSW and most especially, their clients. Court proceedings resulted; young people were encouraged—and at times pressured—to testify before the commission and subsequent criminal prosecutions. Sex work clients were imprisoned, and at least one senior legal figure committed suicide. SMSW changed as a result of this complex public phenomenon.

While this current study captured the SMSW experiences of a group of young males from a particular era, change has occurred, partly as a result of that commission of inquiry. Greater access to mobile communication technology has also caused a change to occur in SMSW. Street-based sex work is now more hidden, dissipated around the city, and hence a less public phenomenon. A spatially mobile phenomenon is difficult to engage. The health implications of this change are significant. While the health risks for those engaged in SMSW have not diminished, tracking, engaging, and providing health service to those engaged in SMSW are now

more difficult. Future research will need to analyse the impact of the commission of inquiry, and of the SMSW developments that have occurred since the commission finished. This new research should focus on questions about the new social context of SMSW: the move from the street to bars, the impact of mobile phones and the Internet on SMSW, and the spread of SMSW to other places beyond the inner city and *The Wall*. New research should also focus on the impact of these changes on the various participants in SMSW — both workers and clients. The desired outcome from such research would be a better understanding of the developing education, emotional, health and social service needs of males who engage in street-based male sex work. This is the necessary starting point for developing new health-related knowledge that, in a time still dominated by HIV and AIDS, is of continuing urgency.

There are other questions that have emerged through this research that point to the need for further research. I have already mentioned in early sections of this chapter that several of the participants spoke of their family and partners, friends and peers, some of whom knew of their involvement in SMSW, while others did not. There are myriad questions that relate to this significant area. Who are these key people who relate to the person engaged in SMSW? What do they know of his experience? How do they grapple with and frame this experience in their own minds? What are the thoughts and emotions that emerge for them over time, as they grapple with the disclosure that someone close to them is engaged in SMSW? We know about the sense of self as experienced by the male engaged in SMSW, but what impact does this disclosure have on the family member's sense of self? Or on the friend's sense of self? Or on the partner's sense of self? What is it like to live with and be intimate with a person engaged in SMSW? These are complex questions that go to the heart of the phenomenon of SMSW that are yet to be explored. Not only is the person's sense of self contextualised; so is his entire existence. This research has considered issues of connectivity. Future research must consider the experience of those who are crucial elements of that essential connectivity.

Of course, this proposed research direction points to the bigger contextual picture. An essential element of this is the parent of the person engaged in SMSW. For every participant, one or both parents occupied a great deal of their thinking. And yet, we do not understand the perspective of the parent. This is a particularly significant future research direction. Nick's mother supported and in fact encouraged his participation in this research. I noted when I gained her consent (as Nick was 17 at the time) that she was sad and worried about her son. I felt an urge within me to stay and have a lengthy conversation with her about her son and his progression into SMSW, but that was not my focus at the time. It should be a research direction in the future.

A critical construct in this research has been that of resilience — the capacity of a person to adapt in the face of adversity. I have learnt much through this research about resilient (adaptive) processes, and I note that my clinical approaches are different to what they were before I began this research. However, more needs to be learnt about resilience in order that we may be able to predict what makes for resilience and what inhabits that capacity. I understand that positive early experiences and the protection of a young person from early or premature exposure are two approaches that build a capacity for resilience. However, we are yet to understand what makes some marginalised young people more resilient than others, particularly when they experience similar levels of negativity. This presents as a clear and significant research agenda that should be explored using both qualitative and quantitative methods. While significant in its own right, what this present research also provides is the fine grain details of experience that could be the basis for developing a large scale quantitative study exploring adaptive experiences and resilient processes in marginalised adolescents. What is it about their experience that militates for or against survival? What particular experiences (variables) combine to enhance resilience or facilitate negative outcomes? We understand that connectedness with education, social groups and the like, are a critical factor in the development and maintenance of resilience in the mainstream adolescent population (Resnick, 2000; Resnick et al., 1997). What we do not

understand is how resilience works within the adolescent population that already experiences—perhaps from birth—a high level of marginalisation. This is a significant gap in our knowledge base, and it is present, in the first instance, because marginalised adolescents are difficult to track, engage with, and research. And yet they are arguably the most at risk population group within our communities. There could be no more significant reason to undertake such research.

## Conclusion

There is considerable gravitas associated with research involving young males who engage in street-based sex work. While they were formally viewed as deviant and in our early colonial time regarded as little better than pestilence, we have moved on in the way we frame their experience and our encounters with them. Far from regarding them as delinquent, we now view them variously as needy, a potential vector of disease, a commercial enterprise, homeless, tragic, and in need of health and other forms of support. While the language may have changed, I'm not sure that we have been able to shift from a pathologising mentality that creates and distances the *stranger* or the *foreigner*. We still struggle to actually see the person within the phenomenon that is street-based sex work.

There is no doubt that their lives are a complex mixture of vulnerability to risk, the absence of health, and yet resilience in the face of adversity. But again, these catch-phrases do not give flesh to the idea that there is a person within the phenomenon of street-based male sex work. And this has been the central aim of this research project. I wanted to know and understand each participant as a person, where one, and only one, aspect of a complex life involved SMSW. By entering intimately into the lives of four young men, we see their involvement in sex work, but most significantly, we see more. Perhaps we do not see a totality of their lives but we certainly become privy to that which is normally hidden from view, by the shadows of the night and the silence of their voices. We discover the significance of their

relationships, and finally, we get a glimpse at the power of education and the promise it could hold, if only education were broad-based and couched within the context of a caring, understanding and compassionate relationship. There is certainly vulnerability within these young men. However, they adapt to the most extraordinary situations and thereby fashion a most resilient response. Intertwined within this complex world are the relationships that are sought, fashioned, and prized. These relationships are the vehicle of resilience.

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# APPENDIX 1

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

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<b>Acid</b>	A hallucinogenic drug, 'acid' – also known as LSD or <i>lysergic acid diethylamide</i> – is one of the most commonly used hallucinogens in Australia. It was invented in 1938 and explored as a treatment for some mental illnesses. During the 1960s, LSD became the drug of choice of the 'hippy' culture. Since then its use has declined, but there is some recent evidence of increased popularity. In its pure state, LSD is a white, odourless powder. It usually comes in the form of a liquid or as tablets or capsules, squares of gelatine or blotting paper. LSD is swallowed, sniffed, injected or smoked. It is very potent, with small amounts causing strong effects. For easier handling, LSD is often diluted with another substance, such as sugar, or soaked onto sheets of blotting paper.
<b>AIDS</b>	Acquired Immune-deficiency Syndrome
<b>B&amp;Es</b>	Break and Enters – a criminal offence.
<b>CSA</b>	Child Sexual Abuse or Child Sexual Assault
<b>DoCS</b>	The statutory welfare department in New South Wales – the Department of Community Services.
<b>Fisting, Fisted</b>	The act of anal penetration by means of a person's hand and arm with the hand closed tightly, with the fingers doubled into the palm.
<b>Gaol</b>	Prison, jail
<b>Gear</b>	Colloquial for heroin
<b>HBV</b>	Hepatitis B Virus
<b>HCV</b>	Hepatitis C Virus
<b>HIV</b>	Human Immune-deficiency Virus
<b>HSC</b>	Higher School Certificate. The last high school examination which is effectively also the university entrance examination.
<b>JJ</b>	The statutory criminal justice department for juveniles in New South Wales – the Department of Juvenile Justice.
<b>Job</b>	An episode of male sex work.
<b>MSW</b>	Male Sex Work
<b>MSWs</b>	Male Sex Workers
<b>Mug</b>	A client in sex work. A pejorative term denoting the person's distaste for the person and their aim
<b>PMSW</b>	Private-list Male Sex Work
<b>Pot</b>	Colloquial for cannabis. Cannabis is a drug that comes from the <i>Cannabis sativa</i> plant. The active chemical in cannabis is THC (Delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol). Cannabis is a depressant drug. Depressant drugs do not necessarily make the person feel depressed. Rather, they affect the central nervous system by slowing down the messages going to and from the brain to the body. Cannabis can also have mild hallucinogenic effects. There are three main forms of cannabis: marijuana, hashish and hash oil
<b>Prison</b>	Gaol, jail
<b>Pro</b>	Colloquial for prostitute

<b>SMSW</b>	Street-based Male Sex Work
<b>SMSWs</b>	Street-based Male Sex Workers
<b>Speed</b>	Colloquial for Amphetamines
<b>Spruiker</b>	The person who harangues prospective customers to entice them into a bawdy show or strip joint.
<b>STIs</b>	Sexually Transmitted Infections
<b>The Fountain</b>	A place in Kings Cross, near the centre of Sydney historically associated with male prostitution or sex work. It is located in the centre of the “red light” district of Sydney, immediately adjacent to Kings Cross Police Station. It gains its name—The Fountain—because male sex work in this area was carried out in a park where the El Alamein Fountain is located. Sex workers and client would sit on the edge of the fountain and wait for the negotiations to begin. Sex work was carried out in 4 major areas in the city: <i>The Wall</i> ; The Fountain; a toilet block at the country terminal of Central Railway Station; the entertainment precinct of George Street in the city. During the 1990s sex work was prosecuted with increased attention at both The Fountain and Central Railway Station and subsequently largely disappeared from those areas.
<b><i>The Wall</i></b>	A place near the centre of Sydney historically associated with male prostitution or sex work. It is located at Darlinghurst Road in Darlinghurst. It gains its name— <i>The Wall</i> —from the large and imposing Sandstone Wall (36 metres high) that bounds one side of a stretch of Darlinghurst Road. The wall along side which young males “work” was the barrier that kept prisoners in gaol. The gaol, long since closed, is now a technical college.
<b>The Wilderness Centre</b>	The Wilderness Centre was a drug rehabilitation, education and adventure learning program operated by a non-government organisation; it was located in isolated bushland some three hours drive away from the inner city of Sydney.
<b>Use</b>	To “use” is to inject heroin.
<b>Ward</b>	A person who is a minor—under 18 years of age—who has been legally placed under the care or control of the state government minister for child welfare and under the practical care and control of a legal guardian, often but not exclusively, the government welfare department; hence the term, “ward of the state”.

## APPENDIX 2

# BRIEF PARTICIPANT PROFILES AND EXPLANATORY NOTES

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### Introduction

As I have already explored within the methodology section of this work, most of the participants were known—directly or indirectly—to me prior to the beginning of this research. This provides a sometimes silent but nonetheless inescapable background to the interview, analysis and writing processes. This prior knowledge exercises an undeniable influence over the direction this research has taken as well as how it has been carried out.

Three experiences mark the clear contrast between this and other research. First, I do not come to my participants as a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, upon which their experience is cast. I have been a counselling practitioner for over 25 years and this influences my perceptions of the participants. Second, with many of the participants, there has been prior contact that is rich with history and meaning. Whether that contact has been with me, or the counselling agency at which I work, he has invariably been the recipient of some, or even significant, help. To flesh out that point, with several of the participants, there has been a discernible air of appreciation experienced because of the prior assistance provide by our agency. That has motivated their involvement in the research. A second form of involvement (and hence influence on my thinking) has been involvement with the participants subsequent to the interview that has been, in part, the occasion for further engagement or ongoing conversation based on the material gained through the research interview. In other words, while the data collection ended when the tape recorder was stopped, the conversations did not and these subsequent events are nonetheless influential on my activity as a researcher.

The relational dynamics established between researcher and participant were complex, unique for every participant and an integral aspect of every aspect of the project; great care and a

high level of ongoing reflexivity was required to protect the participants, the primary clinical relationship I shared with them and the integrity and validity of the research. Bracketing, often spoken of within the context of phenomenological research (Giorgi, 1994, 1995) has not been desirable or feasible, either theoretically or practically. This issue was canvassed in the earlier chapter on method.

What follows, therefore, are the brief profiles on the participants. They are, in part, my attempt at declaring the complexity of the relationship while allowing the reader to understand the prior knowledge, the background, that I have and from which I cannot (and do not desire) to escape or retreat. As Baron (1996) makes plain, “human realities (events, institutions, objects, activities) can only be the *sorts* of realities they are against the background of a web of taken-for-granted culturally and historically located social practices” (p. 15). In other words, this research is necessarily a production of my own background experience, my prior experience with some of the participants, and the research interviews that form the rich text of this research. It is each of these powerful elements, and the melding of these three sources, that requires intense and ongoing reflection if the critical illumination of their lives and experience is to have *validity*. A core aspect of this process is the declaration of prior knowledge and experience as *background*.

## 1. Richard

Richard was 21 at the time of the interview. He began sex work in his early adolescence (c.14). He is of Eastern European extraction and was living with his family in a south-western suburb of Sydney at the time of the interview. He last engaged in sex work when he was 18. He began study at university, worked as an enrolled nurse, began his training as a registered nurse and then moved across to sales work. Richard has HIV and HCV, the latter of which has caused him significant health problems. Richard’s relationship with his family has been strained at various times over the years, a causal factor in his early movement away from the family home. He lived in refuges and on the street, concurrent with his involvement in male sex work. He was introduced to the sex work scene at *The Wall* by other young people who arranged for clients and gave him some basic clues as to how he should handle his experience and the aftermath. During this time, and on at least one occasion, his parents sent him back to Eastern Europe in an attempt to remove him from negative influences. One of their primary aims was to have him join the army of that country. He reported enjoying his time overseas, spending only some of his time with his extended family but having “lots of sex” with other guys around his own age. Since the interview, he has maintained sporadic contact, most often at times of some crisis, or when he was

in need of advice. He has lived in various states of Australia, lived with partners, and also at his parent's home with a partner. He reported that his relationship with his family, particularly his mother and brother improved as he grew older and that his time living with his partner at his parent's home was very positive. His family were aware of his past substance abuse but not of his involvement in sex work. At last contact, they were also unaware of his HIV status, or that of his partner, who was also positive. Richard had no criminal history background and no stated history of sexual abuse. At last contact, Richard indicated that he had a mortgage on three apartments. At the time of submitting this dissertation, his whereabouts and activities were unknown.

## **2. Dennis**

Dennis was 21 at the time of the interview and was living with his mother and girlfriend in the eastern suburbs of Sydney. Apart from a short stint living alone with his girlfriend, he has lived with his mother, or their extended family, all his life. Dennis was born in New Zealand, is of Maori descent, and was brought to Australia when he was five or six years of age. He has returned to New Zealand a few times since his arrival in Australia. Dennis began involvement in sex work when he was 17. He stumbled upon the activity while frequenting a gay nightclub, and was surprised by the desire people had to pay him for something he enjoyed. He began MSW by working out of bars and at *The Wall*. For the last few years, he has almost exclusively worked from a private-list. He considered the activity an integral part of maintaining a lifestyle he enjoyed and indicated that this was what any form of work is about. The other side of Dennis is his involvement in criminal activity and substance use. This has led to high levels of desperation and, at times, significant periods in prison for robbery. After the first interview and during the period of the research, he was in gaol on a number of occasions for threatening violence with a syringe he indicated to his victims was filled with HIV contaminated blood. He has maintained little contact since the research interview. At the time of submitting this dissertation, his whereabouts and activities were unknown.

## **3. Malcolm**

Malcolm was 18 at the time of the interview. He was homeless and highly transient moving between friends and clients for accommodation. He was immersed in and appeared overwhelmed by a lifestyle involving street-based sex work, substance use and other self-destructive behaviour such as crime. At the time of the interview, he appeared underweight and

physically affected by his use of substances. He had been homeless since 11 when he ran away from home and engaged in opportunistic survival sex at 12. He indicated that he had little idea what was happening at the time. His first experiences of male sex work were classified as abuse by him. He was looking for accommodation and reported that he had “no idea at all” what was about to occur when he was approached by a man in Kings Cross. Physical and sexual mistreatment—over a lengthy period—resulted from these first contacts. He was locked in the *mug’s* house at one point in virtual captivity. Our interview occurred not long after he had given evidence in court, in criminal proceedings, against this person. Throughout the research period, Malcolm experienced periods of relative stability but also involvement in fraud matters that finally brought him to court and into gaol for a lengthy period. At the time the dissertation was submitted, Malcolm was again in gaol on a lengthy prison sentence.

#### 4. Damien

Damien was 23 at the time of the interview and had just been released from a period in prison. I first came into contact with Damien when he was 18. At that time, he was working *The Wall* and had made contact with an outreach worker from our agency. Although I had had contact with him for around four years, conversation was minimal and hence the interview was really the first time we had spoken at any depth. Damien regarded himself as enigmatic and silent. It was a personality feature he said he cultured as a form of protection. He arrived for the interview and was under the influence of heroin. This was one of the first points of discussion when we met for the research interview. I expressed my concern regarding his capacity to engage in the interview but he insisted he was “straight enough” and that we should proceed to do the interview. He appeared able to understand and sign the informed consent form. He remained alert throughout the interview. Damien perceived himself as heterosexual and was involved in sex work purely for financial gain. However, at 13, the situation was quite different as he found himself homeless and in search of people to look after him. He regarded his introduction to sex with men as a betrayal of the friendship that was offered by an older person. He formally began sex work at 15 but found he couldn’t handle it. He had a break for three years but returned to sex work when he was 18. The years before his interview were marked by lengthy periods of instability, where substance use was a major issue. Prison was one of the outcomes. He was articulate and thoughtful about his involvement in sex work, seeing it as a necessity when his involvement with drugs was a major issue of concern. At the time of submitting this dissertation, his whereabouts and activities were unknown.

## 5. Jason

Jason was 18 at the time of interview. I first came in contact with him while he was living in a refuge some two years earlier. He had always been striking in his appearance and behaviour. Sometimes he presented as a Goth, sometimes punk, always with hands covered in spiky rings and with heavy metal images scattered over his clothing. Added to these images was the presence of numerous burn marks on his skin. Some of these were from heated cigarette lighters, others from lit cigarettes directly applied to the skin. Jason used words like “satanic” to describe his interests, “sadistic” to describe his liking of pain, and “morbid” to describe his general approach to life. He indicated that the burn scars dated back to when he was 13. He was living in a boarding house at the time of the interview. He was working *The Wall* as required to supplement his income and pay for the necessities of life. Jason was homeless at 14 and headed straight to the inner city. Interestingly, although he has been immersed in the inner city culture for some six years, he appears to have avoided a number of the notable traps usually associated with the combination of homelessness, adolescence and inner city existence — criminality, overwhelming substance use, and incarceration. The first interview was interrupted by several mobile telephone calls and, as a result of one call, the interview was suspended while Jason went and visited his girlfriend. He returned an hour later to resume the interview. After the interview he informed me that he was slightly intoxicated (with alcohol) and that he needed this to help him talk. He maintained irregular contact with me after the interview. Mental health issues began to emerge during his early twenties and he would contact me occasionally. He had one episode in a psychiatric unit. At the time of submitting this dissertation, his whereabouts and activities were unknown.

## 6. Drake

Drake was 23 when he was interviewed. The interview took place in the lounge room of his terrace house. He lived with another gay man who was a sex worker. Drake was born in South America. His family emigrated to Australia when he was 10 years of age. He lived with his mother and stepfather until he was 15, at which point he had a significant and violent fight with his mother and sister, and left the family home. He was taken to an inner city refuge by the police and began to explore inner city life and sexuality. At the time of the interview, he indicated that he was not engaged in sex work but was employed in sales. Seven days later, he was homeless again and without work. Although he indicated during the interview that he had not engaged in

sex work for three years, this again became an option once he lost his employment and housing. Drake was articulate and intelligent, fast talking and eager to impart information about the sex work scene as well as the complicated narrative of his history and relationships. He maintained limited contact after the interview. At the time of submitting this dissertation, his whereabouts and activities were unknown.

## 7. Jeffrey

Jeffrey was 26 at the time of the interview. He was living alone in a boarding house, was unemployed and involved in sex work. This was primarily off a private list. He grew up in another state some 1,000 km south of Sydney. He was admitted to an institution at an early age (around seven or eight years of age) after the death of his mother. He indicated that he and his siblings were sexually abused by their father but that nothing of a legal nature was done about these experiences. While in institutions he was also sexually abused and had access, through other children and institution staff, to drugs — mainly amphetamines. He ran away from the institution on several occasions and eventually ran to Sydney when he was nearly 14. He was homeless and quickly engaged in sex work at *The Wall*. He had strong memories of his institutional days, of the negative experiences and the limited but powerful positive experiences, particularly as these positive moments involved an older female carer within the institution who, for him, became archetypal of the understanding and love that he desired. Jeffrey came across as a loner. He was steeped in the past, alcohol and substance use and yet thoughtful and insightful about his place in the world. Notwithstanding the very negative experiences in his childhood and the continuation of this negativity through more recent substance abuse and time in prison, he expressed hopefulness and a desire to create a future for himself. He was open, eager to talk and thoughtful about people with whom he associated and whom he observed. While seeing MSW as his work, he was reminiscent about his time at *The Wall*, sad about its deterioration because of police, crime and drug use, but nonetheless desirous of continuing in his chosen path. He did not have contact with me after the research interview until he was in gaol, refused parole and was hopeful that I would write a letter or report that would help secure his release. At the time of submitting this dissertation, he was still in gaol.

## 8. Allan

Allan was 22 at the time of our interview. I had known him since he was 15 years of age, the time at which he was released from a juvenile detention centre (prison). He had been in custody for a sex-related offence involving a child. For much of his adult life, he has been in prison, with limited periods of time on parole and in the community. It was during one of those brief periods that the interview occurred. Allan was born in England where he lived with his mother and brother. He had no knowledge of his father. While in England, he was sexually abused as a child. He was brought to Australia by his grandmother after his mother died of cancer when he was 11. He lived with family but by 15, disagreements, and the offence for which he was sentenced, had breached any contact with his family. He went to refuges, detention and back to refuges and then finally was homeless, working *The Wall*, and involved in criminal behaviour. He again went to adult prison. Substance use fuelled his involvement in crime and complicated his relationship with several girlfriends. The interview with Allan was brief, as he was semi-intoxicated at the time. He had contact after because of his involvement in various complicated legal matters. Although he was working *The Wall* at the time of the interview, his main source of clients was a private list, developed in previous years, from contact with clients at *The Wall*. He was arrested soon after the interview. On the last occasion that he was incarcerated, the visa he was granted at 11 years of age, which was never regularised into permanent residency or citizenship, was breached by the Australian Government. At the end of his prison sentence, he was deported to England, a place he had not known since he was 11. Though he retained his freedom, Allan committed a number of fresh offences after his arrival in England. I maintain semi-regular contact with Allan by phone. He does not appear to have begun sex work in England.

## 9. James

James was 26 when I first interviewed him. His story is contained in the first of the data analysis chapters (Chapter 4). The interview took place in his home, a housing department unit in Darlinghurst some 7 minutes walk from *The Wall*. During the interview, James spoke very little of his personal history wishing actively to restrict the discussion we had to sex work. He did however disclose that home became untenable for him at 17 which was when he first began sex work in Melbourne. He also mentioned during the course of the interview that he was on a high dose of Olanzapine (for schizophrenia) and Methadone (for heroin addiction). I knew James

prior to the interview but mostly at a distance as he had involvement with another worker at our agency. James presented as needy but also staunchly independent, thoughtful and insightful. He was affected by mental illness, was pragmatic, distancing of relationships, and yet caring and sensitive to the needs of others. Beyond the chapter analysis, what must be added is the fact that there was ongoing contact after the interview and he has presented as very unwell at times, to the point of hospitalisation. My own experience of him is dominated by thoughts of sadness. He was a man with sex work as a future. He lived in a small bed-sitter as his home. There was the ongoing spectre of mental illness that was exacerbated by sporadic substance use. At the time of submitting this dissertation, James was still in his bed-sitter, working *The Wall* and occasionally in hospital.

## 10. Frank

Frank was 19 at the time of the interview. He had poor literacy and writing skills and so I had to read the consent and information forms for him. I recorded his consent. I had attempted to interview him several times in the 6 months prior to his interview but on each occasion he was significantly drug affected. When this occurred, he was unable to speak coherently. On the occasion of the interview, he had been asleep in his car, his home, for many hours prior to the interview. This was at the end of a lengthy amphetamine-binge. The car was parked at our Centre and he was aware of the interview and presumed I would wake him in time for the appointment. I have known Frank since he was 14 years of age, although he indicated during the interview that I had known him for much longer. His answers were pithy and without detail. He wasn't resistant to being involved but there was no desire to explore beyond the simple responses he provided for what were complex questions. He ate oranges and other food throughout the whole interview. I have strong recollections of our first encounters. He was young and with blue eyes and long curly blond hair, naïve to some things, and yet not to others. His first experience of survival sex occurred in the daylight hours when an older man simply stopped the car as Frank was walking along a main street. The guy offered Frank a ride and food, and this was appealing to him. He hopped in and took hold of what was on offer. After his first experience, he came to our agency and explained how wonderful the experience was for him. He got food from the man, loved the sexual affection, gained money and thought he'd found gold. That began many years of standing at *The Wall*, earning money, spending it on amphetamines, his drug of choice. Interestingly, apart from the amphetamine use, this was the pathway his father followed before him—early sexualisation, sex work, transience. When Frank wasn't using substances, he wasn't in

Sydney. Distance was the only way he found to control the behaviours that he originally loved but closer to the time of the interview found abhorrent and destructive. At the time the research was completed, he had recently returned to Sydney after a lengthy period in another state where drugs were less available to him. He was living with “mugs”, friends and couch-surfing. He was back at *The Wall*, was earning significant money and yet was homeless. Frank identified as homosexual but there had not been a partner or lover outside of the sex work environment. That said, there were clients who occasionally became sexual friends. This was sometimes related to survival and at other times related to substance use. At the time of completing this dissertation, Frank was maintaining ongoing contact.

## 11. Mark

At the time of the interview, Mark was 23 years of age. He was no longer working *The Wall* and wasn't using drugs. He had stabilised his daily existence and gained some security in the activities of daily life. Some months later, he again began sporadically to use substances and was seen up at *The Wall* working. Although he indicated during the interview that sex work was for drugs, he returned to it after drugs were no longer an issue, notwithstanding his protestations about the negativity of the experience. Mark came from outside Sydney and had spent many years wandering through refuges, always struggling to stay in one place. He had been sexually abused as a child and this became a dominating motif in his mind, and in those who sought to help him. Although contact since the interview was sporadic and mostly accidental, it was never at *The Wall*. There was no further conversation with Mark around MSW. It was a first and only exploration into this realm. At the time of submitting this dissertation, Mark was living in an inner city boarding house.

## 12. Brian

Brian was 20 when the first of two interviews took place. His narrative is captured in the first of the indicative profiles in Chapter 4. The contact with Brian was charged with meaning. The rich undercurrent of meaning in our relationship begs to be more fully noted. More than with any other participant, this single and yet complex act (the interview) between us dominated ongoing contact over many years. He was invited to participate and immediately sounded hesitant and yet interested. As he stated in the interview, he knew that he had never talked about his experience as a sex worker and yet he had an intuitive understanding that talking was what was

required. He approached and withdrew over many months after the invitation was first issued, an act that wasn't restricted to his contact around the research. This appeared to be his way of relating to many people, emotions and events in his life. The interview occurred and he felt both exhausted by it and yet captured by the experience of exploring this hidden and yet public part of his world. While the interview appeared reasonably fulsome to me, he was convinced that he needed to stop prematurely, and hence needed to return to the story. On at least 10 occasions, he again approached wanting to "complete" the interview. He appeared dissatisfied. Mainly it seems that what he wanted to "get out" was still inside of him. Two years after the first interview, a second one took place. He was older, more reflective, in a very different emotional place and able to explore some of the minute aspects of the MSW experience. And yet, there remained areas about which he could not speak. His "next question" phrase, followed by a nervous laugh, would dominate parts of both interviews. Having completed the second interview, I believed that would be the end of my contact with him around these issues. Not surprisingly, he returned on four or five occasions to speak with me, even briefly, and the main topic of conversation was the interviews. This time, he wanted to read the transcript and over three contacts, he read the two interviews. The last contact with Brian was just prior to him admitting himself into a residential facility some 400 kilometres west of Sydney. He said that he wanted to use the interviews as a point of reflection. I thought they were a reminder to him of those things about him of which he was perhaps ashamed and unhappy, but certainly uncertain and confused. From a transference perspective, I have a strong sense of the pain that various events in his life have caused him. At the time of submitting this dissertation, he had been in the residential rehabilitation program, with his girlfriend, for over 10 months.

### 13. Steph

Steph was 20 at the time of the interview. His narrative is contained in the third of the *untold stories* in Chapter 4. He was lively, talkative, enthusiastic about telling his story and very keen on helping me, and others, at *The Wall* through the research. His bubbly and bouncy persona lasted throughout the interview and led me to a conclusion that, notwithstanding some of the difficulties faced by him, he was extremely resilient. The capacity for adaptation in the face of adversity was pervasive in the interview between us. There was a non-verbal quality that led me to this conclusion about him in other aspects of his life. Prior to the interview, although known by our agency, I had very little contact with him. As he was very open, much of my knowledge of him coincides with the information contained in the text. Some two months after

the interview, Steph requested financial assistance through our agency for him to leave Sydney and return to the country of his origin. At the time of submitting this dissertation, no contact had been had since assisting him to return to his home town in country New South Wales.

#### **14. Adam**

Adam was 21 at the time of the interview. He was no longer working *The Wall*, was focussing on trying to develop a career in the information technology sector by establishing his own business. Soon after the interview, he headed for another state in Australia. While that sounded clear cut, the reality of his situation appeared to be somewhere between his positive goals and the reality of an unstable and transient life. Substance use and being involved with people at *The Wall* still figured in his daily life. Adam maintained clear boundaries around the research interview. He was very willing to explore whatever arose from questions or from his own comments but was equally lucid about moving on and about life after the interview. The end of the interview marked the end of contact with him. At the time of submitting this dissertation, his whereabouts and activities were unknown.

#### **15. Raymond**

Raymond was 26 at the time of the research interview. He came across as a wily, bruised, hardened man who engaged in sex work as a necessity but loathed every event that made up the experience. He was sad that his life had been reduced to such a state and over such a long period. He was sad but fatalistic about the experience and his future. Raymond was striking in features. Short and nuggety with long dreadlocked hair and a permanently husky voice. He was aware that his slight stature and hairless body made him look like a young boy. They were the features that made him attractive to older men. It was an aspect of the work that made him loathe his clients. He was involved in substance use (mainly amphetamines) and had been to gaol a number of times. When not in gaol, he often resided with “mugs”, as their play object and sometime boyfriend. This was a matter that confused him greatly because he regarded himself as heterosexual. Raymond had been known to our agency for several years, mostly through our outreach service. While he maintained contact for a short time after the interview, there were no further conversations around the issues raised by him in our interview. At the time of submitting this dissertation, I had recently heard of him again. He was 31, still engaged in PMSW and doing a joint sex work job with Frank (participant 10).

## 16. Shaun

Shaun was 23 when our research interview took place. The subject matter for the interview, which included his background history and the drift into prostitution, made him feel tender and upset. However, as he indicated, “I hold that in”. Notwithstanding the pressure to restrain emotion, there were “butterflies” he had to contend with as a part of the interview. Of all of the participants, Shaun was the most fragile in terms of the raw, *in the present*, nature of his experience. By the end of the conversation, one sensation I was left with was that he really needed to convince me that he was heterosexual and not homosexual. This seemed to reveal a fear, or at least concern, within him that his experience, brought upon him by others, had recreated him in a manner over which he had no control. It was this internal phenomenon (and crisis) that appeared to be so destabilising. Notwithstanding these thoughts, that he equally could not control, he was keen to talk, and was thankful for the opportunity, even though it raised many thoughts to which he also applied the maxim, “I hold that in”. Shaun was a client of our agency but had only occasional contact before our interview. There was very little contact after the interview and no further conversation on the issues raised by him during our interview. After a gap of considerable time, he made contact just prior to the submission of the dissertation. A general and limited conversation indicated that he was working “a normal job” and doing “fine”. He appeared keen to keep some type of contact.

## 17. Jacob

Jacob was the first of two participants gained through a search of sex workers who advertised their services using the internet. The methodological rationale for sampling from the internet has already been explored in the methods chapter. While Jacob advertised himself as 23 years of age, one of the first comments he made during our interview was that he was 34. Although he had never worked at *The Wall*, he was aware of it, thought about it, and chose not to do sex work from there. Jacob spent much of the interview in tears and found the interview raised issues and emotions for him, about his life and history, which required attention. Prior to the second interview, he approached his doctor and sought a referral to a counsellor. Jacob was in a relationship with another sex worker, and they worked from their apartment. So much of the angst and emotion he experienced had to do with both historical issues and the difficulties he had in managing their work and the various relationships that occurred at their home. During the second interview, 14 days after the first interview, Jacob noted that the reason he accepted the

invitation to take part in the research was that he wanted to talk with someone about the mostly negative experiences that had nothing to do with his actual sex work. These were to do with the implications for him, his partner and family of being involved with sex work. He was grateful and felt that he gained more from the research encounter than he actually gave. There was no further contact with Jacob after the second interview. I noted near the time of submitting this dissertation that he was no longer advertising sex work services on the Internet.

## 18. Jules

Jules was the second of two participants who advertised their services on the internet. His was also the most provocative in terms of transference and countertransference issues. Jules was 23 at the time of both interviews. Both interviews occurred only weeks apart. As with Jacob, Jules had never worked *The Wall* but had seen the place, thought about it and decided not to work in that mode. Born in New Zealand, he first sought out sex work in his home town through an escort agency when he was 16. He had been working in sex work ever since, first while at school and then while at university. He graduated with a degree in Agribusiness. His sex work was carried out largely from home, where he lived rent free with an ex-client who became a friend. He also worked in New Zealand, San Francisco and New York. The interviews took place at the height of summer. For the first interview, he arrived on a bicycle wearing surf (board) shorts and running shoes, and nothing else. He was hot and sweaty and the board shorts were barely staying in place, often slipping down and revealing pubic hair. He was fit, with a highly toned muscular physique. He sprawled across a lounge in the interview room, played with, or rearranged his genitals from time to time, and took phone calls from prospective clients, arranging sex work events throughout the interview. He was charming and seductive, and knew it, without it appearing to be malicious or manipulative. He was keen to have someone interested in, and listening to, his story. When during the second interview he stated that almost all of his friends were ex-clients, he added, by way of explanation, that "I guess I am just a little more relaxed around people that I have slept with". I had the thought throughout the first interview that perhaps he was anticipating or expecting that there may have been a sexual element to our encounter. This seemed to intensify throughout the interview. Perhaps the more I listened, the more he desired to regularise me into his friendship circle, via a neutralising sexual encounter. The second interview was less provocative, at a sexual level, but none the less intriguing as he brought his girlfriend along, as he sometimes did with his sex work, where she would hide in and watch proceedings from the wardrobe. During the interview, he spoke about the need to

eventually leave sex work, stating that he would like to retrain as a real estate agent selling a different form of property. He asked if I had any contacts in the employment area and I gave him the details of a person in the real estate industry. He contacted me later to thank me and tell me that although he had a job offer, the money he would be paid was little more than what he could earn on a good day or two in sex work, and without the stress or effort. There was further contact after this conversation. At the time of the dissertation being submitted, he was still advertising on the internet with his itinerary indicating a phone number and address in San Francisco and then New Zealand.

## 19. Aydin

Aydin was 28 when we had our research interview. He had been known to me since he was 16 and was, at the time, living in a refuge. He left his family home some two years prior to our first contact as a result of violence from his father. Soon after first meeting Aydin, he moved to a prestigious secondary school paying for his school fees by sex work. His thought about working at *The Wall* but chose to work at a male brothel, a position he sustained, off and on, through his secondary school and his university years. He graduated with a double degree in science and law. He also supported his way through school and university by being a live-in housekeeper for a number of gay couples. After graduating from university, he began practicing in the law both in Sydney and in New York. Although he never returned to sex work, he was tempted to do so, on a number of occasions. He worked in Sydney and our last contact was while he was back in Sydney for a brief visit from New York where he continues to work as a lawyer. An important element of our background contact was that for many years, and while helping Aydin and maintaining clear boundaries, he believed that eventually, I would proposition him for sexual favours. After six years of contact, this finally shifted and it was a significant moment when he was able to acknowledge that he was able to believe that this would not occur. The research interview occurred against this very powerful background of mistrust turned to profound trust. There were strong emotional moments during the research interview where he considered his family relationships, the absence of their acceptance over his sexual identity, and his move to a premature independence and the resultant need to totally support himself. His visit to Sydney, and our last contact, occurred just prior to the submission of this dissertation.

## 20. Peter

Peter was 32 at the time of the research interview. By the time of the interview, I had known Peter for some 18 years. When we first had contact, he was a wild and homeless 15 year old boy who was engaged in petty crime, prostitution, standing over other workers at *The Wall*. He had often been involved in procuring younger males for sex work clients. He was angry, substance using, aggressive. It was difficult relating to him and it appeared almost impossible to help him escape from the vicious cycles that were self- and other-destructive. From when he was 18 until around 28 years of age, he spent a considerable amount of time in gaol on sexual and other assault convictions. In the limited times that he was free, he sought female companionship but these often ended in chaos and, on at least one occasion, was the point of origin for the charges that led him into gaol. During these moments of freedom, he would also visit *The Wall* or try to hook up with former clients. He appeared to be grasping at whatever he could in order to survive. After his last release from gaol, he again struggled to stabilise, but soon after, gained employment as a storeman and packer, a position he was still in at the time this dissertation was submitted. He has contacted me nearly every week since his release from gaol, and while he is still confused about his sexual identity, and somewhat paranoid about relationships in general, he established a relationship with a woman with whom he is expecting a child.

## 21. Nathan

Nathan was 24 at the time of our research interview. He came from country New South Wales, identifies as gay and suffered rejection both in his home and at school. After leaving school, he attended the university through which I am completing this research but left after his first year. He came to the city, became involved in substance use and began to work *The Wall*. He contracted HIV. This progressed into a cluster of quite serious illnesses. He then moved away from *The Wall*. While he was healthy at the time of our interview, his health deteriorated and on a number of occasions became life-threatening. Tuberculosis, meningitis, toxoplasmosis, and AIDS-related psychotic episodes, have all played a significant role in his health since our interview. These illnesses have confirmed his ongoing contact with our agency. While not a part of the formal data for the project, these events and his reliance on our agency have all impacted on the way I read and re-read our interview. Sadness invades me when I think of him and read his words as there have been several times when we have been waiting for him to die. At the time of submitting this dissertation, he had recently been released from a hospice with doctors unable

to treat the progression of his illness. While stable at the time of submitting this dissertation, his thoughts have long been about his death.

## 22. Dominic

Dominic was 22 at the time of our interview. He had been a client of our agency for many years although there was limited and sporadic contact. It was always difficult for team members to negotiate and converse with him. He originated from a beach side suburb in Sydney and had some contact with his family. He had a car accident a few years prior to our contact and reported that some form of brain damage was a result of the accident. This was a major point that required significant discernment regarding whether or not he could provide informed consent to engage in the interview process. With awareness that he was attending post-secondary schooling and was able to deal with the work load there, he was both keen and appeared able. His lifestyle during his adolescence could best be described as messy and feral. He was offered housing but lit a fire on the floor of the lounge room of his housing while under the influence of substances. There was crime, sex work and significant poly-substance abuse; he was constantly unstable, chaotic and threatening to those around him, including while he was at *The Wall*. He was an angry young man with no boundaries. On at least two occasions prior to the interview, he offered to do a sex work “job” with me, an offer I regarded as a sad and desperate act of a person enmeshed in substance use. When he moved into adulthood, he had his first of several brief stints in gaol and this appeared to impact on other aspects of his life. The natural maturing process and time in prison seemed to quieten or refine his behaviour and eventually focus his attention on other goals. It was at this point that he became more interested in exploring the past and it was at this time that our research interview took place. The day after the interview, I noticed him back at *The Wall* and he appeared to be talking quite loudly to himself. Within two weeks of the interview, Dominic was admitted to a psychiatric institution with acute and florid psychotic symptoms. This was his second admission in as many years. There was an overwhelming sense of sadness in the telling of his story. He was a big man, articulate but oppressed by the life he has led and the disappointments of his childhood, the abuse he experienced and the path he unthinkingly followed after those first abuse events. The early absence of his family and the fact that they missed or ignored the abuse he experienced at a very young age continued to trouble him at the time of the interview. It later became a motivation to help others. Dominic has HIV and various forms of hepatitis. He has maintained regular contact with our agency and with me. On at least two occasions, he has alluded to our research interview,

raised again that he has felt oppressed by his past, and then moved on to other points of discussion unrelated to the research. At the time of submitting this dissertation, he was living in a halfway house after having been in a drug rehab program. He had a new girlfriend who worked as a sex worker prior to becoming a fitness instructor.

### 23. Nick

Nick was 17 at the time of the research interview. His story is largely covered as one of the indicative narratives in Chapter 4. I first had contact with Nick when he was 12 and his older brother brought him into our agency for assistance after they had both recently left their mother's home. Nick was living with his brother in a boarding house in the red light district of the inner city. I was unable to interview Nick's brother, who also engaged in sex work, as he was in gaol for much of the time of the research. Their mother also engaged in sex work when she was a younger woman. I have had virtually no contact with Nick since the research interview except on one occasion when he sought financial assistance for our agency. Just prior to submitting the dissertation, I again observed him at *The Wall*.

### 24. Cory

Cory was 23 at the time of our interview. He was a big man, of Eurasian descent and comes from north of Sydney. He identified as homosexual and while he began work at *The Wall*, this was momentary because of the violence. So he maintained his sex work mainly from a private list secured initially from *The Wall*. Cory was enigmatic before, during and after our research interview. My questions were succinct and his answers were equally brief. He was happy to participate but very reserved about providing any more than limited responses. This was how I also knew him at a clinical level within our agency. He was enigmatic and secretive to the point that he was committing criminal acts and this was only discovered by his counsellor when he rang from gaol seeking assistance with a bail undertaking. He spent a considerable amount of time as a first offender in gaol on fraud matters. After his release, he left Sydney and has maintained sporadic contact with our agency and no contact with me. His whereabouts at the time of submitting this dissertation were unknown.

## 25. Germaine

Germaine was 22 when our research interview occurred. He came from a coastal town 6 hours drive north of Sydney when he was around 13 or 14 and became immersed for many years in the gay and street-based culture of the inner city. He was known to me and our agency for about four years at the time of our interview. Crime, substance abuse, homelessness, drug-related aggression, rehabilitation, prison, HIV and HCV were all significant players in his existence. There was no capacity in Germaine for maintaining order. His daily life was spontaneous, chaotic and riven with disadvantage. While looks are not always indicative, his were such an indicator of his state and in such contrast to his age that on their own, they were a commanding influence. At 22 years of age, he was gaunt, wasted, balding, and with rotting teeth. While he verbally described himself in the past as an object of desire (“I don’t know, being a young gay pretty boy, I guessed that I had some kind of talent for the scene”), his comments about himself at the time of the interview portrayed a disconnection from reality (“I’ve still got the looks, I still know how to do it, I know the industry like the back of my hand”). Only on one occasion, was Germaine able to state that this chaotic life had had such an obvious impact. Despite his upbeat approach during our interview, there was a sadness that bled through the experience of the interview. It felt like a life lost. Germaine wandered in and out of our agency, disappeared, went to gaol and was then released. At the time of submitting this dissertation, his whereabouts were unknown.

## 26. Jack

Jack was 26 at the time of our interview and had been known to me for six years at the time of the research interview. We had only exchanged cursory comments in passing. His contact prior to and after the interview was minimal though the interview was significant to him as one of the few times he was able to “tell” his “story and be listened to” at length. Jack came with a history of physical and sexual abuse from within his family and from significant others. He indicated that this has made life and relationships painful. Bright and interested in education, he received a scholarship to a private school but was unable to complete his education. This was a deflating experience that he put down to the abuse he experienced at home and elsewhere. The development of a career path was also very difficult for him to achieve. He also indicated during the interview that he found it hard to trust and his history of “betrayal” provided some reasons for that lack of trust. And yet he talked and cried profusely during the interview which lasted for nearly two hours. The highlight of his life, at the time of the interview, was the relationship

established with his partner. While there were tensions there because he was also involved in some form of sex work, it was nonetheless a significant and stabilising relationship. Their plans to move to another state and begin a stronger and new life together appeared to be a major focal point for him. Jack was tall and handsome with a broad grin that shows a miniscule degree of innocence hidden beneath the more visible scars of real life.

## 27. Leyton

Leyton was 20 when he was interviewed as a part of this research. Apart from Jacob and Jules, Leyton was the participant with whom least contact was had. He was known by our agency for less than 12 months at the time of the interview and for much of that time, was addicted to benzodiazepines. He was engaged in stealing prescription pads from doctors, a crime that saw him charged, convicted and imprisoned on a number of occasions. His memory was impaired by use of “benzos” and although arrangements were made, it was not until he had been in gaol, and was released, that he was in a fit state to be interviewed. Leyton was wily, cunning, and focussed on sex work as a way to gain money for drug use. He identified as heterosexual and regarded sex work as demeaning but necessary. Since our interview, he has been in rehabilitation for substance abuse, in gaol and then again in the community. He contacted me a number of times after the interview but his whereabouts were unknown at the time of submitting this dissertation.

## Reflexive comment

There are several conclusions that arise from these brief profiles on the participants. Research in this area has been at times, for me, a risky exercise. Exposed at *The Wall* and to the night—as they have been—has led (at times) to the misinterpretation of my motives (by participants, clients at *The Wall*, and police. On occasions, I was physically threatened. Very little of this research has fallen within clear and clean boundaries. Emotional and physical risk has been an inevitable aspect of the project. While this has been demanding, it has also brought with it, a level of richness that has more than compensated for the risks. The level of trust afforded to me by the participants has been extraordinary and has impacted on my interpretation of observation and text.

While I interviewed 27 participants, 44 were approached. More than 27 agreed to participate but only 27 reached the point of interview. Other commitments, gaol, substance abuse, forgetfulness, and doubt influenced my contact with those who were not interviewed.

During the research period, several key events occurred that affected their lives and my emotions and reflections. In summary, of the 44 approached, 1 died of an overdose, 2 were murdered, 18 were in gaol at some point, some on multiple occasions, and one was convicted of murdering a client. To a greater or lesser degree, I was a part of each of these events. There is a subjective dialogical interaction that occurs during qualitative research and all of these events had a significant impact on me as the researcher and on the research process (interviews, analysis, and writing). Far from being able to bracket off such events, their undeniable power was incorporated into my thinking and reflections so that as I moved through the research experience, I was able to identify and acknowledge (as much as possible), the psychological experiences that were *of them*, and those that were *of me*. The aim of such a continuous research strategy, was to produce a separation within an inevitable connection with the participants, thereby allowing the researcher to be present to and engage with the participant, but not to swamp or misinterpret the voice of the participant whose story was the subject of this complex critical illumination.

## APPENDIX 3

### INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

#### **The experience of vulnerability, connectivity and resilience in young male sex workers.**

My name is David Leary. I am a doctoral candidate at **The University of New England**. This research project focuses on the experiences of young males who engage in sex work. The hope is that your participation in this project will assist other researchers and counsellors in understanding the experiences and needs of young males involved in sex work. The interviews are a part of my doctoral research.

Your participation will involve an informal discussion at a time and place convenient to you. The discussion will take between one and two hours. During the discussion, you will be invited to talk about your experience of life in general and of your involvement in sex work. It is OK if you do not wish to speak about certain issues or experiences. **Your feelings and wishes will be respected.** After the interview, I may request to speak with you again at some later stage. You do not have to be involved in a second interview, however, if a second interview takes place, the same safeguards will apply. If you wish, a summary of the research findings will be made available to you.

The interview(s) will be recorded on audiotape and then transcribed (typed). The tapes will be locked in a secure place and kept for a period of 5 years. After that 5 year period, the tapes will be destroyed. Only I will hear the audiotape. You will have the opportunity to see and comment on the transcript if you wish. My supervisor will read the transcript after your name and any identifying details have been changed. Information that could identify you will **never** be used or given to another person. If the research proceeds to publication, your anonymity will be assured.

Although the interviews are **confidential**, if you report any serious criminal activity to me (such as a serious assault on a person), or you explicitly indicate your intention to harm yourself, I am not able to keep that confidential. If you attempt to tell me of serious criminal activity, I will attempt to stop the conversation. You may also stop the interview if you begin to speak of such activity.

You do not have to participate in this research project. Your participation or non participation will not affect your involvement with the *Come In* Youth Resource Centre where I am employed. You may withdraw your participation at any time.

If during the interview, emotional issues arise and you would like to speak with a counsellor, I will assist you to make contact with one. Attached to this Information Sheet is a list of places where you can gain counselling assistance. If I consider that such emotional issues place you at risk of self-harm, I will inform the person who signed the consent form with you.

Should you have any complaints concerning the manner in which this research is conducted, please contact the *Research Ethics Officer* at the address listed below. You may also contact the *Ethics and Professional Standards Committee* for the agency where I work. Thank you for your participation with this research.

#### **CONTACT DETAILS**

**Researcher:** David Leary, *Come In* Youth Resource Centre, Paddington, (02) 9331 2691 or 0418 601 580

**Supervisor:** Associate Professor Victor Minichiello, University of New England, Armidale, (02) 6773 3952

#### **Research Ethics Officer**

Research Services

University of New England, Armidale, NSW 2351.

Telephone: (02) 6773 3449

Facsimile (02) 6773 3543

Email: [ethics@metz.une.edu.au](mailto:ethics@metz.une.edu.au)

#### **Carol Pedersen**

**Ethics and Professional Standards Committee**

PO Box 39, Paddington, NSW, 2021

Telephone: 1800 249 740

Facsimile: (02) 9331 1583

Email: [epsc@stfrancis.org.au](mailto:epsc@stfrancis.org.au)

### Counselling Services

Agencies providing counselling	Contact Number
The Kirketon Road Centre The Fire Station Kings Cross	(02) 9360 2700
<i>Come In</i> Youth Resource Centre 457 Oxford Street Paddington	(02) 9331 2691
AIDS Council of New South Wales (ACON) 9 Commonwealth Street Surry Hills	(02) 9206 2000
Albion Street Clinic 150 Albion Street Surry Hills	(02) 9332 1090
Cellblock Youth Health Service 142 Carillon Avenue Camperdown	(02) 9556 2233
SWOP 461 Riley Street Surry Hills	(02) 9319 4866
ACON - Western Sydney 9 Charles Street Parramatta	(02) 9204 2400
High Street Youth Health Centre 65 High Street Harris Park	(02) 9687 2544
RAPS 18-20 Ross Street Parramatta	(02) 9890 1500
The Warehouse Youth Health Centre 13 Reserve Street Penrith	(02) 4721 8330
Western Area Adolescent Team Mt Druitt Community Health Centre Buran Close Mt Druitt	(02) 9832 5030

## APPENDIX 4

### VOLUNTARY AND INFORMED CONSENT FORM

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#### For persons under the age of 18 years

The following two questions must be answered by the parent or guardian of the young person who consents to be involved in the research program described in the attached *Information Sheet for Participants*.

1. Do you understand the nature of the research sufficiently well to make a free and informed decision to consent to participation, on behalf of the person under 18?

**Yes**      **No** (circle the appropriate answer)

2. Are you satisfied that the circumstances in which the research is being conducted provide for the physical, emotional and psychological safety of the person on whose behalf you are giving consent?

**Yes**      **No** (circle the appropriate answer)

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (the participant) have read the information contained in the *Information Sheet for Participants* and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research interview, realising that I may withdraw at any time. I agree that research data gathered for the study may be published, provided my name is not used.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the participant

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the parent or guardian

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the researcher

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 5

### VOLUNTARY AND INFORMED CONSENT FORM

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#### For persons over the age of 18 years

After reading the *Information Sheet for Participants*, the following *Voluntary And Informed Consent Form* must be signed by the person who consents to be involved in the research program described in the attached *Information Sheet for Participants*. If the person wishes to make a verbal consent to participation, this will be recorded on audio tape at the beginning of the research interview.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (the participant) have read the information contained in the *Information Sheet for Participants* and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research interview, realising that I may withdraw at any time. I agree that research data gathered for the study may be published, provided my name is not used.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the participant

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the researcher

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 6

### INTERVIEW PROBES AND OPENING QUESTION

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**Common Opening Question:** When did you first come into the inner city?

1. Inner city experience: when and how
2. Experience of family.
3. People and places of significance in life.
4. Key events in life.
5. The experience of relationships.
6. Where and how they experience themselves as being resilient.
7. Where and how they experience themselves as being vulnerable.
8. Where and how they feel better able to survive, or feel stronger.
9. Connectedness: being and not being.
10. SMSW: experience.
11. Feelings about SMSW.
12. Feelings after work.
13. Impact/consequences of SMSW.
14. Types of clients.
15. Positive feelings: hope, joy, happiness.
16. Negative feelings: regret, sadness, despair.
17. Aloneness/solitude.
18. Isolation
19. Criminality.
20. Gaol/detention.
21. Sexual identity.
22. Sexual identity and sex work.
23. Suicidality.
24. Self-harm.
25. Substance use.