

SEXUALITIES, IDENTITIES AND BODIES:
REDUCING THE VULNERABILITY OF HIV/AIDS
AMONG MALE SEX WORKERS IN THE
PHILIPPINES

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ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this study was to explore the **pagkatao** of male sex workers in the Philippines and the ways sexual orientation, sex work and bodies are created, influenced, and modified based on the mindsets of the informants in the study (**loob**) and the nature of the discourse and practices that are manifested (**labas**).*

*This study pointed to the fact that **pagkatao** of the male sex workers is socially constructed and is shaped by social, political, and economic influences, and modified throughout life. The **loob** (inside) and **labas** (outside) Filipino model aided in ascertaining the cultural meanings of sexuality that the participants in the study have structured in their minds and how these find utility in both oral and verbal languages that participants use.*

Analysis of the informants' oral narratives obtained during the interviews produced the overarching themes of sexual meanings, sexual relationships, perceptions on sex work, sexual and personal self-identification, and bodies.

*The multiplicity of sex workers' social sexual networks and the range of sexual practices they engage in make it difficult to ascertain their **pagkatao**; there are marked incongruences between the social constructions of male sexuality and the realities of these men's sexual experiences.*

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Thus, their sexualities, identities and use of their bodies at work and non-work are defined as being challenged and modified through the sex workers' lives.

Introduction

In 1990, the World AIDS Foundation commissioned members of the University of the Philippines Manila AIDS Study Group to undertake a comprehensive study on sex work in the Philippines in the light of the impact of HIV/AIDS worldwide. This project paved the way for designing an appropriate HIV/AIDS prevention program for sex workers. Among all the different types of sex workers in the country such as male and female free-lance sex workers, massage attendants, providers of escort services and child sex workers, the research team decided to target establishment-based male sex workers.

Establishment-based male sex workers was a logical choice. It was convenient to give the education on HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections because they work only in one place. The project resulted in the training of male sex workers as peer agents on HIV/AIDS. In the process of designing an intervention program for them, the study group was especially interested in looking at their lives as sex workers, their sexual practices in the club (i.e., sexual negotiations, condom use) and the types of sexual services that made them vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS.

In the course of the 1990 research, the group realized that male sex workers entered the industry because of economic reasons. Majority of the interviews with them revealed the fact that they came from poor families and did not finish even secondary level of education. So they decided to become sex workers. Although some of these sex workers tried menial jobs such as waiters in restaurants or laborers in construction firms, their salaries were not enough to send home. Moreover, life in a big city like Metro Manila proved to be very expensive.

Most of the sex workers were born and raised in the provinces where their parents were either farmers or factory workers. They came from large families with six to ten siblings. Schooling is done alternately — an elder brother or sister has to stop going to school every other year to make way for another sibling's education. Those who were out-of-school had to find work in their provinces to help augment the family income.

The adventure of going to Metro Manila was a dream for the sex workers. They would hear about job opportunities from their relatives in Metro Manila who visit them in the provinces. This triggered their ambition to try their luck in the big city.

Becoming a sex worker was a conscious decision. Majority of the male sex workers revealed that their peers and cousins were the ones who introduced them to sex work. While they knew what a "sex worker" does in a club, they saw their work as "easy money". To them, the fastest way to have money was to entertain and provide sexual services not only to gay men but to female clients as well. The study also showed that they give services to groups of men or women.

Sexual pleasure was their trade. For them, nothing was morally wrong in what they were doing because they opined that they were not robbing their clients of money but were giving them pleasure. This mindset brought the study group to examine their sexual orientation. The study found out that most of them had sex with their girlfriends, and later with homosexuals. Thus, their sexual experience with both sexes put them at an advantageous position in becoming sex workers.

The male sex workers knew how to take good care of themselves. To become merchandisable or saleable/sellable to clients, they developed their bodies especially their torso. Since most of them were macho dancers, they performed on stage in skimpy briefs, they also put effort in developing their thighs and

buttocks. Some went as far as putting implants or other devices to provide more pleasure to their clients.

Statement of the Problem

The 1990 study determined that establishment-based male sex workers had multiple sex patterns of different genders. The motivating factor in their becoming sex workers was economic. What we however failed to do in that project was to situate the sexual orientation, sex work and sexual practices within the totality of their personhood or *pagkatao*.

Pagkatao is a Filipino term that expresses and characterizes a person. The shaping of a character or an identity is manifested by self-actuations, personal motivations, ambitions and realizations. Social or cultural norms and values contribute to this *pagkatao*. They can be found in education, family life, media, religion, etc.; *pagkatao*, in this sense, is internally shaped and externally constructed by a person. Identity is a result of *pagkatao* as it refers to the integration of the self, or the person, as a whole.

Pagkatao is above identity since identity is confusing. This is because identity emphasizes self-perception, sometimes on classification by outsiders. Sometimes, it means a well-integrated personality and at other times, one element of a multiplicity of identities. The concept of *pagkatao* gives first, an opportunity to highlight how the sex workers see themselves, and second, it draws attention to their different identities (homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, worker and male gender) while maintaining the general perspective of their whole personality.

Applying this term in relation to the male sex workers, I intended to inquire into the relationship between who they are and what they do. I sought to ask these questions. What motivates them to become a sex worker? What is "work" for them? What does sexuality mean to them?

However, I cannot deny the fact that in the course of this thesis, the question of the identity of sex workers often surfaced, that is, whether or not they are homosexuals, heterosexuals, or bisexuals. Avoiding a debate on the differences of Western constructs of sexual identities and orientations and Filipino constructs, I still opine that when one discusses one's sexuality — from libido to pleasure to personal goals in life — the development of one's *pagkatao* needs to be explored. I argue in this thesis that understanding a male sex worker's *pagkatao* is a result of his identity or a label that he consciously attaches to himself and at the same time a reflection as to what he does with regard to the *sexing* of his body (i.e., making his body more commerciable to clients) and the perceptions about his work. Thus, for this new research, the *pagkatao* concept is more practical to discuss because I am using *pagkatao* as the basis of their perceptions on their sexualities, identities and work.

The Study

This study aims to explore the *pagkatao* of the male sex workers and how it relates to their own perceptions as sex workers, their sexual practices and their work. The following questions were asked:

1. What are the life histories, sexual histories of these sex workers?
2. What meanings and symbols are they attached to or do they attach themselves to? How do they self-identify?
3. What shapes their *pagkatao*? How do they label this?

The research design used in this study was a combination of interviews and observations. Interviews served as an opportunity to further discuss the narratives categorized in the following study themes: (1) sexual orientation; (2) sex work; and, (3)

bodies. An interview with a floor manager plus a focus group discussion with a few clients of the male sex workers were done to gain more insights.

The research was *exploratory* and *descriptive* in nature. Data collection was further augmented by using Filipino approaches. I am using Filipino approaches because I am studying the *pagkatao* and culture of the Philippines. I believe using Western approaches will not enable me to fully explain the object and the subject of my study. If I insist on using Western typologies and constructions, then I might perpetuate our miseducation and possibly colonial domination. When one tries to explain *pagkatao* according to the “white man’s” concept, one continues the miseducation process, that is, when studied in the research, it can be limited to Western psychology or anthropology. Moreover, the bias in the use of Filipino approaches was made to avoid the many pitfalls that tokenism in the use of Filipino approaches can cause. This can lead to distortion of Philippine social reality and the glossing over of the uniqueness of the Filipino as the subject of the study.

This also means that to completely understand the *pagkatao* of the Filipino, it is imperative that we recognize his social and historical contexts. He is not an existence that precedes the essence type of existentialism. He is a product of his history and his environment. In that way, he is unique.

These approaches fit the Filipino’s narration of their stories. Further, it was sensitive to what Filipinos want to narrate or tell, that is, how they want to reveal their true selves. Since I am dealing with the ethnographies of sex workers and consequently touch issues that are sensitive to them, the use of these approaches will make them comfortable. The following were the approaches:

Pagmamasid is a Filipino term for observation. I took critical notes on verbal and non-verbal communications from the

participants for this project. Every wink of the eye or gesture while being formally interviewed or being spoken to in chats or short informal conversations mattered so much in deriving the thought processes of the participants. Being a Filipino myself, it was easy to decipher or identify from the participants any sudden and unconscious body movements that led me to probe into their *pagkatao*. This *pagmamasid* is an effective gauge or springboard for clearing the participants' thought processes or responses to my inquiries. By using this method, the participants were at ease in discussing their life stories or narratives, most especially if their inner feelings can only be expressed in our language (*Filipino*).

Pagmamasid also means probing into one's *pagkatao* but not necessarily on a person-to-person level, so it also means that I needed to observe the participants' interactions with their clients, fellow workers and club managers. In this case, I used the note-taking technique.

Pakikiramdam is feeling one's way through the process of getting to know the participants very well and their trust to share gaining their life stories. In this case, I needed to use a "language" distinctively used in the club such as Filipino words like '*Pare*' or '*Kumpadre*' or '*Pards*' (brother or close friend). Using these terms made the participants more open and comfortable most especially when we discussed their sexual histories and sexual values. *Pakikiramdam* method was a useful instrument in this research because it centered on the feeling that I was accepted in the club, giving me a free rein in asking them sensitive questions without causing embarrassment.

Pakikilahok means being a concerned researcher in the process in interview sessions and in informal conversations within the club. I showed much attention, making them aware that I was concerned about their mind processes and interested in what they do in the club. By using this method, it opened the gates

for more and deeper conversations wherein they expressed their more personal feelings and statements about their work and themselves to me. In one instance, I was one of the judges of their weekly search for the “exotic macho dancer”. My participation in the activity and the acceptance of the management and the sex workers gained me an entry into their world.

Pakikipagkwentuhan is a form of socialization or verbal exchanges among Filipinos. It is an informal conversation and/or storytelling from how they were growing up to how they saw themselves after they have decided to stop from being a sex worker. *Pakikipagkwentuhan* is not only through chats but more of how a sex worker structures his narration of his life — in his own words and body movements. I was more of a listener in this method because I gave them the freedom to express themselves and only asked them questions if I felt I needed to probe further on some of their statements. Nonetheless, I let them be the story teller.

I think that sometimes in their attempt to be scientific, researchers become more concerned with their methodology and instruments than with the people they study and who eventually will be described in their work. This research accepts the challenge that it is now time to change research perspectives and analytical tools — develop from within society models and constructs which will best reflect the manner in which people confront, cope and deal with real life situations that challenge them everyday. It is, therefore, not enough that we examine peoples' behavior, we must contextualize our observations about them.

The use of these Filipino approaches enabled me to enrich my field data by noting down expressions, feelings, movements and/or exchange of ideas. These are positive reinforcements for me, as a researcher, because I realized that there is more information that can be derived from everyday experiences with them and that I do not have to rely on my more or less “structured” interviews.

Sample and Analysis of Data

Due to the personal and sensitive nature of the thesis, the informants in this study were selected purposively because I allowed the club's floor manager to determine the participants based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) the length of years of a sex worker on the job; (2) physical attributes; and, (3) the sex workers most frequently "taken-out" by clients of the club. A total of five individuals or male sex workers were interviewed.

The floor manager I consulted and interviewed was considered as the oldest and most experienced manager in the club. I allowed him to choose the informants for the study because he not only knew the workers personally, but he was also responsible for recruiting the boys.

Initially, I planned to have informal conversations or *pakikipagkwentuhan* with a few clients of the male sex workers. However, this proved to be difficult because I could not sustain my inquiries while disco music enveloped the entire club. Also, I found it very unethical to squeeze in sensitive questions to a client while he/she is being entertained by a sex worker. Given this situation, I befriended a client who had friends who frequently visited the club. From this set of individuals, I formed a focus group discussion that was conducted in the house of a client.

The life stories and information about the sex workers including the floor manager and the clients of the sex workers will be described in the data presentation part of this thesis.

The interview guide used open-ended questions. This provided the participants the opportunity to be as detailed as they wished in terms of the information that they wanted to provide. In a sense, the participants created their own instruments.

Valid qualitative research should accurately depict the participants' experiences and try to sketch a larger picture from

their stories (Acker et al., 1983; Du Bois, 1983). Also, it should portray a picture of the socio-cultural context of the experience (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). I transcribed verbatim from a voice recorder all narratives from the interviews. This gave me the certainty that all transcripts were faithful records of the responses and narrations from the informants. This also gave me a feel of the data.

To enable me to understand better the informants' workplace and what they do, I needed to comprehend the 'culture' or environment in which they operate and the language they use. In the case of this study, I have been involved in the male sex work industry as a researcher since 1992. This enabled me to adequately understand its culture, its influences on the male sex workers, and the rich phrases that have a different meaning. I acted both as an 'insider' and as an 'outsider' to the culture.

Since data for the study were collected in Filipino, the informants had the opportunity to express themselves without being misunderstood, or without the danger of not finding the appropriate words in English while expressing their feelings and meanings about their sexualities. However, in several occasions, they mentioned that it would have been easier to discuss these matters with someone who has been an associate in the club and who, as one interviewee said, "really knows and understands what I am talking about". This implies that they were reluctant at first to share with me how they felt about being a sex worker or even to narrate their life stories because I was not one of them. However, after telling them that I have been associated with the club since 1992 and doing HIV/AIDS education with previous male sex workers, they slowly opened themselves up to me.

Prior to the 1990 study, I had some personal reflections about the kind of work they do in comparison to my own sexual orientation and preference. In fact, I underwent a desensitization process of my personal beliefs with regard to men-having-sex-

with-men by participating in sexuality workshops conducted in my place of work (university). When I conducted a research about the male sex work industry, I learned about the male sex workers' personal beliefs and perceptions of what they do and who they are. Since then, I saw myself both as an 'insider' or an 'outsider'.

The informants were contacted and a time was set to discuss with the floor manager the study requirements. The procedures involved were explained to the informants and they were asked if they were willing to participate in the process. Those who agreed to participate, signed a prepared consent form.

Open-ended questions such as "Is there anything else you would like to share?" and "Anything you would like to add or discuss?" allowed the informant to expand or add information without feeling pressured to talk about a particular topic. The interviews were held in the informant's preferred location to allow them to be comfortable and to establish a sense of privacy. Most of the time, the interviews took place just before the opening of the club at 7:00 in the evening.

The content of the narratives from in-depth interviews, feedback on interpretations and personal notes were subsequently analyzed. I divided the analysis process in three stages: (a) identifying themes and developing concepts; (b) coding the data; and, (c) understanding the data in the context in which they were collected.

My analysis of the data adhered to these stages. I personally transcribed the written narratives and audiotaped interviews. This step provided an early exposure to the data and helped me become familiar with the narratives. I read the transcripts five times. In the first three, I read but avoided making interpretations or analysis. However, I scribed a few notes for further use in the analysis. After the third reading, I made a list of common

ideas that recurred in the data. I retyped in double-space all transcripts to allow me to write down comments and questions. Then I read the transcripts twice, allowing for side notes about emerging themes and ideas. Again, emerging themes were written down and compared with the existing ones.

In my conversations and in the focus group discussions with the clients, I used two different interview guides. I also transcribed the audiotaped interviews and read them. From the printed copies of the verbatim transcriptions, I coded some of the parts that directly touched my study themes.

In doing my fieldwork, a notebook proved to be handy. While doing *pagmamasid*, I was able to write down important information, for instance, about their sexual negotiations or transactions with their clients. Also, I took note on the use of their language inside the club and during negotiations, some of which will be discussed in the presentation of the data. Taking down notes was not easy at all because I frequently went out of the club or went to the club's toilet. I always had a good excuse if some of the sex workers asked about my so called "disappearances" from my seat by telling them that I needed to make a phone call or meet someone at the gate.

I thoroughly read my notes every time I arrived home from the club and wrote down marginal notes that I felt I needed to probe. Concerns centered on how sexual negotiations occur, how much is the price for every sexual service or what types of sexual services are provided by the male sex workers. While some of these concerns were discussed during the formal interview, I felt that there was a need to ask them again to get more details. If not, the notes provided me an opportunity to ask follow-up questions which I failed to develop when I previously interviewed them. They granted me 'follow-up' interviews through small informal conversations.

Another data analysis processing I did was through *pakikipaglahok*. I was invited to become a judge in two activities of the club. One was the *Santacruzán* (a Catholic ritual during the month of May, regarded as the month of flowers) where beauties parade in the streets with their escorts. In this case, the beauties were the female impersonators of the club. Female impersonators are gay men who have breast implants and sport long hair. They mimic or impersonate such singers as Gloria Gaynor, Diana Ross, Barbara Streisand or Celine Dion during shows in the club. These impersonators were escorted by some of the male sex workers of the club. Another activity I participated in was being a judge in their weekly search for the 'exotic macho dancer'. These activities proved to be useful because I had the opportunity to experience how they judge beauty according to their standards. I wrote down all observations in my notebook.

Review of Literature

Martin Foreman's *AIDS and Men: Taking Risks or Taking Responsibility* (1999) identified men as primarily responsible in the transmission of HIV because of their participation in most risk-taking activities such as unsafe sex (i.e., homosexual and/or heterosexual) and drug injections.

In fact, as stated by Ma. Consorcia Lim-Quizon, Aura Corpuz et alia's "Status and Trends of HIV/AIDS in the Philippines" (2002), men, particularly men having sex with men (MSM), were identified by HIV Serologic Surveillance (conducted by the Philippine's National HIV Sentinel Surveillance System) as one of the subpopulations to have the highest risk of acquiring HIV.

This can be attributed to their behavior towards safe sex, masculinity and their partner (Foreman, 1999). "Men are gen-

vestigations that focus on sociocultural construction of sexual conduct. However, most of them (have) been often published in relatively obscure places with only limited distribution outside quite specialized academic settings (Parker and Aggleton, 1999).

Such a scenario has not in any way contributed to the holistic understanding of sexuality but has instead promoted the intellectual myopia surrounding the already obscure field of study. It has also reinforced the negative connotation attached to sexuality. Such a connotation has been attached to sexuality because of its "sex component". Sex is generally considered bad. Gayle Rubin's "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality" (1999) even considered this notion as "the most important ideological formation" and label it "sex negativity". Sex negativity, citing Jeffrey Weeks, is a Western ideological formation that considers "sex to be dangerous, destructive, negative force" (p. 150).

"Most Christian tradition following Paul holds that sex is inherently sinful. It may be redeemed if performed within marriage for procreative purposes and if the pleasurable aspects are not enjoyed too much" (p. 150). This ideological formation was very much evident during the Victorian period and reflected much in Richard von Krafft-Ebbing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*.

Moreover, biomedical studies on sexuality have meagerly contributed in formulating a definition for sexuality.

Robert Padgug's "Sexual Matters: On Conceptualizing Sexuality in History" (1999) has expressed his difficulty in defining the concept of sexuality:

Dictionaries and encyclopaedias refer simply to the division of most species into males and females for purposes of reproduction; beyond, that specifically human sexuality is only described,

never defined. What the ideologists of sexuality describe, in fact and only, are the supposed spheres of its operation: gender, reproduction, the family, and socialization; love and intercourse. To be sure, each of these spheres is thought by them to have its own essence and forms (the family, for example), but together they are taken to define the arena in which sexuality operates (p. 17).

E.R. Mahoney in *Human Sexuality* (1983) added that most books do not provide any precise definition for sexuality. Most authors perhaps assume that their readers have apt comprehension about the complexities of sexuality. Nonetheless, Mahoney recognized the dynamic nature of this new field of study and believed that such definition evolves as it ages.

If acquiring a definition for sexuality is problematic, so is the concept of masculinity. Masculinity as part of the overarching discourse on sexuality is generally defined in biomedical terms and presented in Western parameters.

The problem can be seen in the case of MSM in India. According to Sonia K. Katyal's "Exporting Identity" (2003):

. . . Western constructions of sexuality (i.e. masculinity) are markedly inappropriate in delivering culturally specific HIV/AIDS health service to some men in South Asia. Instead of the term "gay" or "homosexual", they have opted to use the term "men who have sex with men" (MSM). . . (which is used to denote those for whom homosexuality connotes a behavior, not an identity) (p. 3).

The Philippines is somehow at par with other countries with regard to this lexical difficulty. Michael Tan, Ma. Theresa Ujano Batangan and Henrietta Cabado-Espanola in *Love and Desire: Young Filipinos and Sexual Risks* (2001) said that "sexuality (is) a problematic construct. Not only was there an absence of Filipino words for those terms but the English words had in fact gone through semantic shift" (p. 16).

Michael Tan in *Sex and Sexuality* (1998) added that “sexuality is a western construct that covers a range of phenomena, many of which may defy lexical labels” (p. 2).

Such should be regarded more of a challenge than an obstacle especially now that there is a great need for culturally-sensitive and culturally-responsive HIV/AIDS health services.

Constructing Sexuality

It is inevitable to lay down the existing descriptions of sexuality in order to give one a bird's eye view of the complexity of this subject matter.

Edwin Benzel Steen and James Price's *Human Sex and Sexuality* (1977) describe sexuality as a “broad term (that) involves an individual's entire personality. It involves the identification of a person with (his/her gender) and with that identification, a person develops feelings, attitudes, and behaviors that are appropriate for that sex”.

“Sexuality may be defined as the expression of one's totality as a person. It may refer to one's masculinity and femininity. . . It also covers a range phenomena making it ambiguous and difficult to define” (Aggleton, Homans, et al., 1989; Aguilin-Dalisay et al., 2000; Padgug, 1999; Tan, 1998).

Nonetheless, many studies have still been conducted to know how sexuality operates in various phenomena as reflected in the smorgasboard of perspectives that construct sexuality. As Peter Aggleton, Hillary Homans, Jan Mojsa, Stuart Watson and Simon Watney's *AIDS: Scientific and Social Issues; A Resource for Health Educators* (1989) quoted Plummer: “Human sexuality is . . . enmeshed in the dialogues of theology, philosophy, medicine, literature, law, morality, psychiatry and the sciences” (p. 68).

Nativism / Essentialism

Robert W. Connell and Gary W. Dowsett's "The Unclean Motion of the Generative Parts': Frameworks in Western Thought on Sexuality" (1989) enumerated various perspectives on sexuality.

One of these is nativism. Nativism is "the assumption that a given pattern of sexuality is native to the human constitution... (means it is). . . fundamentally pre-social." There are two forms of nativism—religious nativism and scientific nativism. Religious nativism espouses a thought that interprets sexuality as "lust" and thus contradictory to Christian values, particularly ascetic Christian tradition. This outlook was institutionalized in monasticism when chastity was strictly enforced (Connell and Dowsett, 1989, p. 179).

This thought was soon replaced when Charles Darwin published *Descent of Man* in 1874. The emphasis of this book on the importance of sexual attraction in sexual selection per se as mechanisms of evolution paved the way for scientific nativism. Scientific nativism is very much the same with essentialism, for it considers biological factors as primary determinants of one's sexuality. Sexual essentialism, according to Rubin (1999):

(is the) idea that sex is a natural force that exists prior to social life and shapes institutions. Sexual essentialism is embedded in the wisdoms of Western societies, which consider sex to be eternally unchanging, asocial, and transhistorical. Dominated for over a century by medicine, psychiatry, and psychology, the academic study of sex has reproduced essentialism. These fields classify sex as a property of individuals. It may reside in their hormones or their psyche. It may be construed as physiological or psychological. But within these ethnoscientific categories, sexuality has no history and no significant social determinants (p. 149).

Essentialism has been dominating the discourse on sexuality since the 18th century when population emerged as an economic and political problem. During that time, according to Michel Foucault in *History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, sexuality was either discussed in medical terms “via the nervous disorders”; in psychiatric terms when it set out the discourse on the etiology of mental illness, focusing its gaze first on “excess”, then onanism (particularly on children), then frustration, then ‘frauds against procreation’; and as a (police matter) when sexual perversions were considered as heinous crimes and crimes against nature.”

This thought became more applicable to humans when Richard von Krafft-Ebbing published *Psychopathia sexualis* in 1886. “This was essentially a scientization of the image of the ‘sexual other’ or the “other Victorians” as Foucault put it. Krafft-Ebbing distinguishes the normal sex from the horrendous abnormal ones. For one to have a normal sex, one should be adult, married, and heterosexual and do the heterosexual missionary copulation. Any deviation from this accepted pattern is already considered a perversion. This kind of thinking with the help of medical, legal and police records, amidst the Victorian atmosphere backed Krafft-Ebbing to catalogue and classify many types of sexual degeneracy (Connell and Dowsett, 1999; Mahoney, 1983).

If Krafft-Ebbing viewed sex with fear and disgust, Henry Havelock Ellis on the other hand handled sex with open-mindedness, eventually bringing a new light to acts Krafft-Ebbing considered to be perversions—masturbation is acceptable for both sexes of all ages, homosexuality is not a perversion, to name a few. Nevertheless, he remained a scientific nativist for he believed that sexual disorders were generally psychologically based as seen in his *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (Connell and Dowsett, 1999; Haas and Haas, 1990; Steen and Price, 1977).

Sigmund Freud, meanwhile believed that psychological disorder is caused by sexual repression. Freud further discussed sexuality in the realm of psychoanalysis. “(He) developed a flexible but profound therapeutic and research technique; produced also a detailed developmental model of human sexuality, bringing childhood sexuality into focus” (Connell and Dowsett, 1999, p. 181).

William Masters and Virginia Johnson meanwhile dealt more with the anatomical/physiological aspect of sexuality, i.e., the changes that occur in one’s body particularly in one’s genitalia during copulation (Connell and Dowsett, 1999; Mahoney, 1983).

The concept of heterosexuality and homosexuality vis-a-vis sexual behavior was investigated by Alfred Kinsey in his *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1935) (Haas and Haas, 1990). Kinsey, in the said pioneering studies, opines that a person is neither exclusively heterosexual nor exclusively homosexual. One’s sexual attraction or behavior may change from time to time. He constructed a continuum that veers away from the traditional binary opposition (i.e., heterosexual and homosexual) (Weinberg, Williams, and Pryor, 1994).

Aggleton et al. (1989) said:

...It is wrong to distinguish between two distinct populations, heterosexual and homosexual. The world is not to be divided into sheep and goats. Not all things are black or all things white. . . Only the human mind invents categories and tries to force facts into separate pigeon-holes. The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects. . . It would encourage clever thinking on these matters if persons were not characterized as heterosexual or homosexual, but as individuals who have had certain amounts of heterosexual experience and certain amounts of homosexual experience. . . (p. 69).

Gore Vidal, as quoted in Jonathan Ned Katz's *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (1999), went even further by claiming that:

There is no such thing as a homosexual or a heterosexual person. There is only homo- or heterosexual acts. Most people are a mixture of impulses if not practices, and what anyone does with a willing partner is of no social or cosmic significance. . . (p. 99).

Social Constructionism

Social constructionists would agree with Vidal's assumption except for the part where he assumed that one's action towards his/her partner is of no social significance, not to mention the whole construction of sexuality the nativists espouse.

To begin with, anthropologist Carol Vance said that the social construction of sexuality (or "frame" theories according to Connell & Dowsett (1999)) "adopts the view that physically identical sexual acts may have varying social significance and subjective meaning depending on how they are defined and understood in different cultures and historical periods (Vance, 1999). (One should note the phrase "sexual acts may have varying social significance" for this dismisses Vidal's claims. Moreover, Aggleton et al. (1989) said that "sexuality can never be isolated from its social context").

Robert Padgug in "Sexual Matters: On Conceptualizing Sexuality in History" (1999) further identified the factor that construct sexuality. He named it *praxis*.

Praxis is the congregation of "language, consciousness, symbolism, and labour. . . Through *praxis* human beings produce an everchanging human world within nature and give order and meaning to it. . ." That 'everchanging human world' pertains to the 'activity and interactions'—active, social relations—and not simply 'acts' (e.g., enumeration and typology of individual orgasms which is individual-centric) (pp. 20-21). These active

interrelations then construct time-specific sexual and other categories, which will eventually change as interrelations and relationships are altered.

On the other hand, Carol Vance in “Anthropology Rediscovered Sexuality: A Theoretical comment” (1999) identified culture as primary responsible in the construction of sexuality:

Cultures provide widely different categories, schema, and labels for framing sexual and affective experiences. These constructions not only influence individual subjectivity and behavior, but they also organize and give meaning to collective sexual experience through, for example, the impact of sexual identities, definitions, ideologies and regulations (p. 43).

The overarching sexuality that encompasses sexual practices, sexual categories, and their corresponding sexual and social meanings are constantly constructed and reconstructed by the society. Sexuality can then be considered as very relative, ever changing, fluid, and very mobile (Foucault, 1978; Weeks, 1999; Vance, 1999; Aggleton et al., 1989).

Connell and Dowsett (1999) traced the development of what they called “frame” theories and identified key persons which have contributed to its progress.

William Simon and John H. Gagnon (1999) introduced the concept called social scripts. Adapted from the sociological approach role theory, human sexual behavior is patterned after the stereotype expectations or social scripts (p. 184).

Rubin (1999) conceived sexuality as a social structure in her sex/gender system. “Sex/gender system is a set of arrangement by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied” (p. 159).

Meanwhile, Margaret Mead argued that the making of the ‘social personalities of the two sexes’ was a social process, a mat-

ter of a cultural template being placed over the natural variability of temperament (Archer and Lloyd, 1985).

Vance (1999) noted two things: 1. the problem already posed in the previous discussions—lack of definition of sexuality; 2. her criticism on the cultural influence models of sexuality. According to her, cultural influence models emphasize that:

“culture shapes (sexuality). . . but the bedrock of sexuality (is still) the biologically determined powerful sex drive or impulse and the core of sexuality is reproduction; gender and sexuality are seamlessly knit together; recognized variations in the occurrence of sexual behavior are in cultural attitudes which encourage or restrict behavior but not in the meaning of the behavior itself; and accepts the existence of universal categories like heterosexual and homosexual, male and female sexuality, and sex drive.

It is important to note the last characteristic of cultural influence model for it is the significant and obvious factor that differentiates this model from social construction theory and marks in similarity with nativism/essentialism. Cultural influence model and essentialist belief on the compartmentalization of sexual categories has led to the reaffirmation of the connotations tagged to heterosexual and homosexual: heterosexual is normal, while homosexual is a perversion.

Nevertheless, the nativist Kinsey has shown his objection through his sexuality scale. This undertaking has inspired Martin Weinberg, Colin Williams, and Douglas Pryor in *Dual Attraction: Understanding Bisexuality* (1994) to use Kinsey's scale in classifying bisexual types in the United States. These types include the “heterosexual-leaning type who considers homosexuality (as) an ‘add on’, the ‘pure type’ scoring exactly in the middle of the Kinsey scales (have equal amount of sexual encounters with same and opposite sex) and the homosexuality-leaning type who was uncommon.”

More types of bisexuality were further identified by Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, as featured in www.Fathom.com/feature/35637. Bruehl used Sigmund Freud's classic three domains of sexuality—physical characteristics, mental characteristics, and object choice.

Types of bisexuality:

Time Frame: 1. Transitional bisexuality: A person behaves bisexually during a transition from predominant heterosexuality to predominant homosexuality (or vice versa). 2. Historic bisexuality: A person behaved bisexually in the past. . . 3. Sequential bisexuality: A person alternates between predominant heterosexuality and predominant homosexuality. 4. Concurrent bisexuality: A person behaves heterosexually and homosexually in the same time frame or in a menage a trois. Function: 1. Married bisexuality: A married person takes a same-sex lover. 2. Secondary bisexuality: An (unmarried) person without heterosexual outlets engages in homosexual sex, or one without homosexual outlets engages in heterosexual sex. 3. 'Latin' or 'Greek' bisexuality: A married person routinely has same-sex lovers; mentoring may be involved in the same-sex relationships. For men, a passive role may be proscribed. 4. 'Berdache' or 'two spirited' bisexuality, i.e. bi-gender identity; A person 'marries' a same-sex partner and may have opposite-sex lovers as well. 5. Ritual or Melanesian bisexuality: A young person's rite of passage that involves same-sex activities with an older person. 6. Adolescent or experimental bisexuality. Same-sex or opposite-sex relationships that form as part of an identity quest. 7. Technical bisexuality. Same-sex or opposite-sex activities that are a part of work (for example, sex work or prostitution, espionage). 8. Equal bisexuality. A person chooses partners of both sexes for reasons other than the partners' sex or gender.

Social Constructions, invoking Padgug's *praxis*, view that sexual categories are ever changing. Katie Deverell and Alan Prout in "Sexuality, Identity and Community: The Experience of

MESMAC" (1999) claimed that "sexual identity may be more fluid, and that it arises and is formed in a context" (p. 345). They further said that Anglo-American sexual categories do not exist and cannot be imposed to some societies. Padgug even noted that such categories are unknown to the ancient Greeks. Apparently, this view is more radical than the view that homosexual and heterosexual behavior and acts are universal but homo- and heterosexual identity is socio-historically and culturally specific (Padgug, 1999; Katyal, 2003; Vance, 1999). On the other hand, essentialists/nativists and social constructionists also have varying notions on the construction of masculinity. Foreman (1999) argued that "masculinity is biologically determined or culturally induced."

It seems, however, that this time there are more descriptions and explanations coming from the social constructionists. Kenneth Clatterbaugh's *Contemporary Perspectives on Masculinity: Men, Women, and Politics in Modern Society* (1990) identified the six major perspectives that dominate contemporary discussions of men and masculinity in modern North American society: conservative, pro-feminist, men's rights, spiritual, socialist, and group-specific perspectives.

The conservative perspective reaffirms the essentialist/nativist perspectives of masculinity. Masculinity is natural and pre-social. Men behave as dictated by their nature and/or their biology that makes "it is perfectly natural for men to be the providers and protectors of women, and to be politically and socially dominant" (making men in control or reaffirms the hegemonic stereotype of masculinity) (Clatterbaugh, p. 9).

This stereotype of masculinity according to Steen and Price (1977) is "strength, power, courage, endurance, aggressiveness, independence, lack of emotional sensitiveness and success" (p. 16).

June Machover Reinisch, Leonard A. Rosenblum and Stephanie A. Sanders in "Masculinity and Femininity: An Introduction" (1987) on the other hand enumerated the synonyms to the word masculine which were lifted from *The Synonym Finder* by J.O. Rodale—"Masculine: Robust, strong, lust, energetic, potent, brave, bold, fearless" (p. 3).

This kind of view towards masculinity, according to Foreman (1999), has been one of the factors that perpetuate men's role in the transmission of HIV. Safe sex (i.e., use of protection) is viewed as unmasculine for it hinders sexual prowess (masculinity is defined as sexual prowess and virility—man's ability to penetrate and besides "real men do not get sick").

Such behaviors and attitudes are manifestations of male nature as espoused by the conservative perspectives. There are two types of conservative perspectives, namely, moral and biological perspectives. The moral perspective is grounded on the belief that "masculinity is created by society in order to override men's natural antisocial tendencies. (This can be achieved) through the civilized role men play when they are fathers, protectors and providers. On the other hand, the biological perspective views that "virtually all social behavior is a manifestation of men's natural tendencies as selected through an evolutionary process" (Clatterbaugh, 1990, p. 9).

Proponents of profeminist perspective believe that "masculinity is created through male privilege and its corresponding oppression of women, although they (maintain) that traditional masculinity, is also harmful to men" (Clatterbaugh, 1990, p. 10).

Men's rights perspective stresses more on the fact that masculinity has affected more harm to men rather than to women. Feminism has aggravated such situation (Clatterbaugh, 1990, p. 10).

These two perspectives somehow would agree with Eleanor E. Macoby's "The Varied Meanings of 'Masculine' and 'Feminine'" (1987) when she claimed that males receive more social pressure to conform to the stereotypes of masculinity. It seems that men are in a constant battle—protecting and regaining their masculinity (Foreman, 1999; Reinisch et al., 1987).

"The spiritual perspective, on the other hand, is founded on the conviction that masculinity derives from deep unconscious patterns. These patterns are best revealed through a tradition of stories, myths, and rituals" (Clatterbaugh, 1990, p. 10).

Contrary to this, socialist perspective espoused the belief that sexuality is a social reality, which is grounded in economically determined structures. Masculinity is defined as the hegemony over the modes of production or production relation as Connell put it (Clatterbaugh, 1990; Pingol, 2001).

In spite of the numerous notable perspectives surrounding masculinity, the problem still lurks its ugly head—the scarce, if not non-existent, definition for masculinity. Foreman (1999) and Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson's *Constructing Masculinity* (1995) both share the same sentiments on the difficulty to define masculinity. This difficulty stems from the differences on men's behavior and men's expected behavior. Clatterbaugh (1990) proved that the problem in giving definition is even more difficult as she presented the concepts of masculine gender role, stereotype of masculinity, and gender ideal.

Masculine gender role is a question about what men are, a set of behaviors, attitudes, and conditions that are generally found in the men of an identifiable group; stereotype of masculinity is a question of what people think men are, a general idea of what most people consider to be the masculine gender role; and lastly, gender ideal is the question of what people think men should be (p. 3).

On the other hand, Judith Butler argues “that gender (masculinity for that matter) is not merely constructed but rather it is performative. Berger et al., added that “masculinity is . . . not as a monolithic entity, but as an interplay of emotional and intellectual factors—an interplay that directly implicates women as well as men, and is mediated by other social factors, including race, sexuality, nationality, and class” (Berger et al., 1995, p. 3).

It seems that such observations are very much radical but there can never be more radical than the concern on sexuality being espoused by Connell and Dowsett (1999). They emphasized the importance of recognizing changing sexual identities and communities as themselves constitutive of the changing order of society, particularly in the postmodern world of the late twentieth century (which somehow reaffirms Foucault’s conception of the omnipresence of sexuality). Simply put, society does not construct sexuality but instead society is constructed sexually.

Constructing Filipino Sexuality

In view of Katyal’s “Exporting Identity”, one may surmise that sexuality in the Philippines has been shaped by its colonial history. Sexual categories have been “exported” from Western countries through “foreign influence and globalization.” (Katyal cited the concern of political leaders in one African country over the formation of gay communities, which is considered as an undesirable product of Western influence).

Brazil somehow shares the same experience with the Philippines with regard to Western influence on sexuality. Richard Parker’s “‘Within Four Walls’: Brazilian Sexual Culture and HIV/AIDS” (1999) claimed that heterosexuality (*heterossexualidade*), homosexuality (*homossexualidade*) and bisexuality (*bissexualidade*) are clearly present in Brazilian culture. The history of these sexual

categories are linked to the emergence of predominantly Western-influenced modern medical sciences in mid-twentieth century and “has become more widely disseminated in recent years through its increasing use on radio, television and the press” (p. 256).

The immense Western influence does not hinder Filipino authors from constructing Filipino sexuality as seen in the works of Michael Tan (*Sex and Sexuality*), Alicia Tadeo Pingol (*Remaking Masculinities*), and Grace Aguilin-Dalisay, Roberto Moran Mendoza, Edzel Jose L. Mirafelix, Francis Rodriguez Bambico, Mariano R. Sto. Domingo and Jay Yacat (*Pagkalalake: Men in Control? Filipino Male Views on Love, Sex and Women*).

In Tan's *Sex and Sexuality* (1998), it was emphasized that “sexuality defies the instruments of Masters and Johnson. . . (hence it) cannot be reduced to a physical or biological phenomenon. Instead sexuality is socially constructed in particular cultural and historical setting.” Pingol's *Remaking Masculinities* (2001) presented two perspectives:

- 1) the socialization perspective which shows masculine identity as framed by the local culture where traditional beliefs, and values and norms are embedded in the male psyche in the process of growing up; 2) constructionist view which becomes more suitable because the men in this study are in a cultural system of values and beliefs which is getting relatively unstable as a consequence of globalized labor (p. 225).

G. Aguilin-Dalisay et al's *Pagkalalake. . .* (2000) utilized Virgilio Enriquez's Sikolohiyang Pilipino concept. “Sikolohiyang Pilipino points to the vital role of culture in understanding concepts as well as human behavior.”

The use of the native language, moreover, in identifying specific terminologies is very much evident in Filipino researches. Perhaps, Filipino authors have recognized the importance of language, as one of the components of *praxis*, in the construction

of human sexuality. Richard Parker, Gilbert Herdt and Manuel Carballo in “Sexual Culture, HIV transmission and AIDS Research” (1999) further said that “language is often extremely important in making out cultural domains and categories which construct the domains of gender. . .” (p. 421).

That is why the absence of any Filipino term for sexuality is one of the key factors that make the construction of Filipino sexuality difficult. “There is no term for sexuality in any of the Philippine languages. . . (for it) is a Western construct” (Tan, 1998, p. 2).

Nonetheless, numerous local terms describing masculinity have been identified as a result of researches on masculinity.

Aguilong-Dalisay et al., (2000) presented the numerous studies cum description of masculinity. One of these are the studies conducted by Philosopher Leonardo de Castro and Rogelia Pe-Pua and her colleagues. Their studies are in unison in saying that physical characteristic is an important component for Filipinos to consider one masculine. Physical characteristic, according to de Castro, pertains to the possession of penis and its corresponding action towards it. Pe Pua and her colleagues, on the other hand, equated physical characteristics to “overall physical appearance, reproductive capability, physical strength and even manner of dressing” (p. 19).

However, the said characteristics would not suffice for one to be considered culturally male. A male should measure up to the behaviors considered masculine by the society. The socially acceptable characteristic of men is described in direct opposition to women, which explains why the phrase “para kang babae” is considered derogatory by men. “In order to be a man, according to Elizabeth Badinter, one should not be feminine, not be a homosexual, not be effeminate; not have sexual or overly intimate relations with other men; or not to be impotent with

women”. Paradoxically, males are the ones who predominantly use such kind of labeling (Aguiling-Dalisay et al., 2000); Tan et al., 2001).

Moreover, socially desirable characteristics, particularly the performance of one's role, are also important. Most Filipinos consider a male masculine if he is either a good father or a good provider. Aside from this, men still have to prove “themselves to the society that they are really and truly males.” As Santiago's study put it, *lalaking-lalaki* (manly men) is different from the *tunay na lalaki* (real men). Aguiling-Dalisay, on the other hand, identified the difference between *tunay na lalaki* and *ganap na lalaki*. “Real men (*tunay*) are *maprinsipyo* (principled) while the actualized men (*ganap*) are those who have started their own families and look after their welfare” (Aguiling-Dalisay et al., 2000; Tan et al., 2001).

Despite the numerous studies presented, the sexuality and masculinity of the subject of this study (i.e. Filipino male sex workers) remain obscure, hence, the need to do the challenging yet urgent task of constructing one for such as Foucault argues conceals the truth.

Pleasure and Bodies

The Club

The location of this study is an establishment-based bar called Club 690 aptly called ‘sais’ (termed as six in Spanish). It is open every night of the whole week. As an establishment-based bar, it operates like a business. The owner of the club, a Filipino-Chinese, employs regular staff of four to five floor managers, one of whom is a personnel officer who interviews applicants applying as receptionists, as they call ‘sex workers’ and another an administrative officer who takes care of the club's accounting

and auditing procedures. Each floor manager maintains a stable of 10 to 20 receptionists.

One cannot determine exactly the number of male sex workers or “receptionists” in the club. This is so because I was informed by the floor manager that the sex workers have the option not to report to the club. Some of them either had previous commitments outside the club with their clients or were just lazy to go to the club. Thus, it can be assumed that there are more than 15 male sex workers in the club every day.

The bar or club is located in the northeastern part of Quezon City, one of the urban sites of Metro Manila. The club, established in 1975, is the oldest entertainment center catering, not exclusively though, to gay and bisexual men. The site is a two-storey building where the stage and karaoke bar are located on the ground floor. On the second floor, several rooms are used by female impersonators as dressing rooms. These rooms used to be reserved for clients who have sex with male sex workers until the city government banned sex hostels in 1999.

About 10 male sex workers mount the stage and gyrate in their skimpy trunks (Hernandez et al., 1993). The rest of the sex workers either stand or loiter around the club, eyeing possible clients or being “tabled” by clients. Being tabled would mean a sex worker is requested by a client to sit with him in the table for an hourly fee of 100 pesos which can be equivalent to 2.00 US dollars.

The club prepares three entertainment shows or segments starting around 11:30 p.m. —(1) an all-boys *mamcho* (term for hunks or studs) dancing; (2) dance routines by in-house dancers usually as back-up to female impersonators; and, (3) an all-boys macho dancing but this time with stripping (although not totally) of their skimpy briefs. Each segment lasts for 30 minutes and is accompanied by disco music. Once a month, the man-

agement puts up a gig or a contest of sorts to lure more customers, like the 'Search for the Exotic Macho Dancer of the Week' every Monday or the 'Search for the Beauties 2002 of the Week' (or a gay men beauty contest) every Wednesday.

There are more than 10 establishment-based gay bars in Metro Manila but most of them cannot compete with Club 690. The club continuously enjoyed a reputation as the watering hole for show business personalities, particularly male gay film directors and producers who are looking for new male talents, making the club a ground for aspiring actors. On several nights, I also observed that there were political personalities entering the club and tabling male sex workers as well.

For the past five years, the club opened its gates to female clients while other gay bars were strictly catering to gay and bisexual men. This decision was a strategy made by the club owner because women seeking entertainment from male sex workers were also a captive market. In fact, during my fieldwork, there were nights when women clients outnumbered gay men clients. There were single or unmarried women clients who were either sex workers themselves or overseas contract workers who just had returned from abroad. There were married ones whose spouses or husbands worked abroad.

Since its establishment in 1975, the club has enjoyed police protection from the City government. This is so because the club unselfishly assists the city government by sending their club entertainers (i.e., female impersonators as singers and macho dancers) to the city's entertainment programs and activities. Thus, they also enjoyed a good rapport with the political dispensation of city officials when this study was made.

The club shows are not as daring or lewd as those in other gay bars. The macho dancers just dance onstage primarily to tease clients and have them tabled afterwards. Unlike in other

gay bars, the workers are not expected to undress or become totally naked while parading around the club.

Male sex workers

Fifteen male sex workers were the informants of this study. I have only selected five informants who narrated their life stories before becoming sex workers and will be presented in this chapter as a requirement for the understanding of the study themes — sexual orientation, bodies and sex work. All transcriptions done were originally in Filipino but for this part of the study, all narratives were translated in English. The original Filipino texts are kept for reference if needed. To protect the anonymity of my informants, all names of the sex workers (including of the clients and the floor manager) are fictitious.

Ariel was born and raised in Lanao del Sur located in the south of the Philippines. His father was a soldier who died while in active duty in Mindanao. By that time, he was one and nine months old. His mother took him to his paternal grandmother in Ilocos Norte, the northernmost part of Luzon, the largest island in the country. That was the last time he saw his mother. Ariel was an only child. He grew up with his grandmother and took his primary, elementary and high school education in the said province. Life in the province was fine as they still could afford to eat three times a day, an indication of their hand-to-mouth existence. He said he had a good circle of friends who gave him moral support and attention despite growing up without having a mother around. His friends became his source of stability as a person, giving him advice whenever he has problems or even dishing out money for him when needed.

One day, his uncle who worked in Manila visited him and suggested that he can continue his schooling in Manila. His grandmother agreed and sent him to Manila under the guidance

of his uncle. He was immediately attracted by the hustle and bustle of the city that he decided not to continue his studies but instead looked for work. His first job, at the age of 18, was working in a garment factory; but after a year, he resigned. He said that aside from receiving a small income, he felt that the job was physically demanding. So, he moved to another job, this time, as a security guard for a major commercial bank in Metro Manila. He was 20 years old then.

It was during his stint as a security guard that he began to work on his body in a gym. He opined that he needed to be physically fit because of the demands of his work as a security guard. A gym instructor teased him to try his luck as a male dancer in a gay club but he shrugged this off. However, he confided to me that he thought of that suggestion very seriously because that meant easy money for him. He read in the newspapers that a certain club was accepting male models. He applied at Club 690 and was immediately accepted by the manager as a receptionist.

At present, Ariel is living alone in his rented place in Caloocan City. Ariel is one of the "star" dancers in the club. He is one of the favorites of clients. He is always being tabled, mostly by gay men clients.

Kenzmon, 30, was the second oldest among the participants in the study. He was born and raised in Pampanga, an hour and a half from Manila. He is the third child among eight siblings. His father was a welder who died when he was nine while his mother did laundry for families in his province. At the age of 10, he left school and proceeded to Manila. He did not ask permission from his family when he left. He told me that he wanted to be on his own because he was a problem child.

While in Manila, he lived with strangers in different slum areas. He worked as a cigarette vendor in the street. Although he

had a married sister living in Manila, he decided not to live with her because he thought he would only be an additional burden to her. He said his sister's family was not well-off like their family in Pampanga. Besides, he said, he needed to lead his life on his own and solve his own problems.

Being alone in Manila, life was tough for him. He not only transferred from one house to another under the care of total strangers, he also acquired a vice — smoking marijuana at the age of 13. Aside from vending cigarettes, his street friends also introduced him to selling sex. He had to sell his body in the street at the age of 14 to gay men and to women. At the age of 17, he worked as a strip tease dancer in 103 gay club, whose shows were considered at that time as most daring and lewd. After three years, he moved to another gay club, International Club in Caloocan City and stayed there for another three years.

While being employed as sex worker at the International Club, he joined a macho dancing contest sponsored by Club 690. He won the third place in that yearly event and afterwards he decided to move from International Club to Club 690.

At present, Kenzmon is living in a rented place near Club 690. He regularly sends money to his family in Pampanga. He also sends a monthly allowance intended for his two-year old son who stays with the mother whom he did not marry. He has plans of putting up a business after retiring from sex work three years from now.

Julius, 19, is the youngest among the participants in this study. He was born and raised in Tondo, believed to be a tough neighborhood in the city of Manila. He is the third child of five siblings. The eldest brother worked as a macho dancer in Club 690 several years back. Julius confided to me that his brother introduced him into sex work in the same club. He idolized his brother so much because when their father died when they were

still young, his brother took over the responsibility of taking care of the family. Her mother was a housewife. Unable to finish his high school education, his brother applied as a receptionist in Club 690.

He did not hesitate to become a sex worker in the club because he believed that it was so easy to earn money. In fact, his brother was not against it either. His brother was even proud of him because he was helping him augment the family income. Now that the brother has retired from sex work, Julius continues to work as a receptionist in the club. His brother is eight years older than him.

Julius said that his family is like a mouse — always scavenging for food. In order to survive, they made plots in the backyard of their small house to plant vegetables. He said his mother could not afford to send all of them to school because of sheer poverty. When his brother became a macho dancer in the club, they had a steady income but it was still not enough to respond to the needs of his other growing siblings.

Julius is another “star” dancer of the club. He was always being tabled whenever I had the chance to do some observations in the club. He was also a member of back-up dancers whenever female impersonators perform on stage. He told me that he, along with other macho dancers, planned to go to Japan and work as a male entertainer before the end of the year. According to him, male entertainers in clubs in Japan are called *hostos*. He added that the kind of work in Japan is similar to what they do as receptionists. If given the opportunity, he said he really wanted to work there because going abroad to work was his dream. By doing so, he said he could surely financially support his family.

Gerald is the most sought after sex worker in Club 690. At the age of 26, he has been in the sex industry for the six years.

Gerald was born in a fishing village of Catbalogan, Samar, a province in the Visayas, the third largest island in the Philippines. He is the fifth of seven siblings from the second family of his father. His father separated from his first wife and had seven other children. He was a fisherman while his mother worked as a laborer in rice fields. He mentioned that he had a happy childhood and vividly remembered that when he was small, he would run after his father and help him in his daily catch. It was a simple life, he said. However, when his father died when he was 13 years old, their lives were on a bind. He stopped schooling and decided to go to Manila to look for work.

Finding work in a big city was not easy at all for Gerald. He lived with his maternal uncle in Marikina City, Metro Manila, the shoe-making center of the Philippines. He worked at a young age of 14 in a small shoe factory. He stayed in the factory for three years and found another job as a bagger in a big grocery store. He stayed there only for six months and moved to work in a construction company. He was 18 years old at that time. He stayed with the construction company until he was 20. It was during this time that his mother became ill and he needed to send money to purchase medicines. His income was not enough to buy expensive drugs for his mother.

One day, on his way home, he said, he stopped by a gay bar and saw an advertisement that it was looking for male dancers. Out of curiosity, he entered the club and inquired about the job. After being interviewed by the bar manager, he was accepted and was requested to start his work that very day. He said that he was surprised to receive on his first night an amount of money equivalent to his one-month salary as a construction worker. Since then, he enjoyed his stay there and transferred to other gay bars until he found his way to Club 690.

At the time of the interview, Gerald was a returnee of Club 690. He recently arrived from Japan where he worked as a male

entertainer. He returned to Club 690 because he finished his three month contract in a club in Japan.

Among the sex workers in Club 690, Gerald was the most good-looking. He took pride in saying he devoted his time to develop his body as he pumps iron almost everyday. He was one of the few sex workers in the club who admitted wearing penile implants. When I was doing my fieldwork, his customers in the club were mostly women.

Gerald was planning to go back to Japan and work again as a *hosto* (male entertainer) because he thought he earns well. From his last contract in Japan, he received a monthly salary of US\$500 plus commissioned drinks. He confided to me that he saved money while in Japan and carried an equivalent of US\$2,000 when he arrived in the Philippines, after three months of work.

Marvin, 32, is the oldest participant in this study. Like Julius, he was born and raised in Tondo in the city of Manila. He is the fifth among seven children. Orphaned early like all of the respondents, his father died when he was 16 years old. He was able to finish his high school education while doing part time work in a textile firm. Being the only male among the siblings, Marvin did not proceed to college and instead continued his work in the same textile firm as a full time worker. He said that he was industrious and even got paid for his overtime work. He stayed with the firm until he was 28.

He got to know Club 690 when he was delivering textiles to a place near the club. Since the club was known as a gay bar, his supervisor who was with him at that time teased him and suggested to him to try his luck as a dancer since he had a well-developed body. He took the joke seriously and applied several days after. When he was interviewed for the job as a receptionist, he was immediately accepted and requested to start his work that same day. He earned a lot during his first night but still

continued to work in the textile firm during day time. However, due to the physical demands of juggling two jobs at the same time, he resigned from the textile firm for an obvious reason — he earned better in the club.

Today, Marvin is an old weed in the club. He thought of retiring from sex work next year. He said that he was able to save enough money to put up a small business. He confided that he needed to plan his life because he was getting old. He continues to support his family aside from his eight growing children from five different women. He said that he could not help it but he is really a lady's man.

All of the male sex workers interviewed for this study came from poor families. Their state of poverty caused them to seek greener pastures in Metro Manila. Coming from large families and from provinces where employment opportunities proved to be limited, the informants sought help from their relatives to assist them in finding work and money, except for Kenzmon. The role of relatives is important in Filipino families because they form a large support group specifically in finding employment and money. If one relative is in need of help, an uncle or auntie for example, one would always extend a hand to alleviate the situation of the one in need. In fact, people from the provinces who came to the city seek shelter with relatives. There are instances when two to three families live under one roof. This is typical in a patriarchal society like the Philippines.

Another trait of these participants was their determination to help their families in leading comfortable lives. While all of them started in menial labor such as factory work or vending food, their goal of earning more money no matter what the costs has propelled them to achieve it. Ariel, Julius and Gerald even plan to go to Japan to earn dollars. The participants knew the value of thrift while living in the city and the responsibility

of sending money to their loved ones in their provinces. This is reflective of one's desire to achieve a higher status in life most especially if the welfare of the family is at stake. The concept of family, thus, is essential in the lives of these sex workers. What holds them to their work is all related to family welfare. This is another typical value of Filipinos. Everybody in the family, married or not, still continues to put a contribution to the family's economic bag.

The informants emphasized in their narratives their roles as men in the family. When their fathers died, they took the responsibility of taking care of their families. This unwritten trait comes automatic among families in the Philippines, which put premium on the roles assigned to sons. In this case, the informants did not only help their families in terms of their economic needs in general but carried also responsibility for sending their brothers and sisters to school, putting up business for their mothers or even attending to the welfare of their own children. Marvin's responsibility, for example, does not end in providing money for his family but he also looks after the welfare of his eight growing children.

Most of the sex workers were impressed by peer groups and associates. Their friends have been their source of support. This is a clear indication of their socialization process while growing up. Their "world view" about the things and events around them was developed through their interactions with their friends. Kenzmon, for example, lived with strangers who were responsible for introducing him to his vice and sex trade. Thus, social networks among the participants also play important roles in shaping their *pagkatao*.

None of the informants mentioned religion or faith as a basis of their strength and wisdom. I can surmise that religion did not play a decisive role in their becoming a male sex worker. In my

in-depth interviews with them, I was conscious in not asking them about their faith or the basis of their morality, unless they mentioned it themselves. All narrations, however, pointed to the fact that what is moral for them boiled down to economics, not to faith or religion. As men, they need to provide the financial support for their families and give their younger siblings and their children opportunities like quality education which they never had in life.

The Floor Manager

Critical in this research was the participation of a floor manager because his vast experiences with male sex workers enabled me to better understand the 'inside' and 'outside' of the trade. Louie, 38 years old, has been a floor manager for the past decade. His responsibility was primarily to recruit boys to become sex workers or receptionists as he termed it. Aside from hiring receptionists, Louie and three other floor managers took care of a stable of five to eight receptionists during club hours. He receives commissions whenever a member of his stable is being bar-fined by a client. "Bar-fined" means that a client pays the bar or management for taking out a sex worker from the club. Normally, clients would approach a floor manager to do the choosing for him, that is, to be tabled by him and perhaps to have sex later on. Louie maintains a string of clients who regularly go to the club.

As a manager and recruit officer, Louie knows the tastes and preferences of clients. Whenever an applicant is interviewed by Louie, he takes time in explaining what that applicant is expected to do once he has been accepted in the club. He asks for background information such as work history and the reasons why an applicant wants to be a receptionist. Physical examination forms part of the interview session with an applicant. He

inspects the applicant's entire body. I asked Louie why he needs to do that and he replied by saying that clients go to the club to be entertained and to have sex with a receptionist later on. As such, he needs to inspect the body of an applicant if it is smooth and fair skinned without scars. One needs not to be good-looking, he said, but the applicant must have a "macho" image. This "macho" image should be exemplified by a stud because many of their clients prefer *real* men as receptionists.

Louie enjoyed his work because he receives feedback from clients with regard to his receptionists or sex workers. I can confirm this, since after every interview, I always counter-checked with Louie the answers made by my informants.

Louie is an *old hand* in the business of sex. Louie is also a dear friend and a confidante of most sex workers in the club. The sex workers approach Louie for their problems, may they be personal or otherwise. He knows what and how a sex worker thinks.

When I was interviewing Louie, he gave me his impressions about the sex workers in the club. He said that no good mannered person will be in this business and work as a receptionist. He opined that sex workers are either problem children of their families or escaped the cruel and harsh life in the province. He continued by saying that the main reason why the sex workers stick it out in the club is because of easy money. Economics is a major reason. Further, he said that most of the sex workers in the club come from poor families and lived in rural areas where opportunities for employment are just too limited. He said:

Most of the boys here either come from broken families or had one deceased parent. They had no one to help them. They feel helpless. They got to know this place because of their friends. Money is easy here. Some of them use this

opportunity to meet clients who can help them and provide them work.

Another point he made was that there is nothing wrong in being sex workers because he opined that they do not rob money from people but instead give pleasure, for a fee. Louie said that while sex workers give pleasure, they themselves enjoy it, too. He added:

Before they enter in this kind of work, they have experienced sex with others, for example, with their girlfriends or with homosexuals. I asked them about their experience when they apply here as receptionists. There are no virgins here.

He also said that the male sex workers really value their job so well that they develop their bodies in order to be more “saleable” to clients. They make their bodies more *manly*, as he puts it, meaning more muscled and buffed. He continued by saying—

Even before they entered this club I noticed that they take good care of their face, of their bodies. Maybe men are becoming vain unlike before. Like women, they feel that it is also important to have a clearer skin and healthy hair. I really don't know but I guess this is what is happening now among men.

The bodies of sex workers become their economic capital and, therefore, position to command or influence what price they will ask from clients. Louie even said that some of their workers went so far as having their noses fixed by doctors, their bodies pierced, other areas improved. As this juncture, I surmise that the bodies of these workers are not only seen as economic bodies, but as political bodies as well. Through their body

movements they communicate to clients that they are ready for the taking for a higher price. This came to my mind while I was watching them gyrating on stage. For them their dance is not a regular dance, it is a ritual. It is like a ceremony that involves a series of actions and movements performed in a fixed order. Every move, every sway of the hips, every wink of the eye while dancing are innuendos or clues where the sexing of body is at play.

Clients of sex workers

Interviewing the clients of sex workers in a focus group discussion proved to be interesting and, at the same time, it gave other dimensions or meanings to what I am looking for in this thesis — sex, work and bodies. I cannot deny that the participation of the clients is crucial in understanding the *pagkatao* of these male sex workers. I argue that the clients are one of the social networks of the workers and that they continue to contribute to the way sex workers see themselves, both on personal and on professional levels.

As originally planned, I indulged myself in small talk with a few randomly selected clients inside the bar. This proved to be frustrating because I felt that I was intruding into their private conversations and intimate moments. Instead, I befriended a client whom I met by chance while taking my smoking recess outside the gate of the club. After going through the rigors of asking “why are you here” and “what are you doing in this bar” type of questions, I introduced myself and the purpose of my nightly visits in the bar. The client got interested and offered assistance by organizing a very small group of his friends where we could discuss my research questions extensively.

The client, **Brigs**, is 35 years old, a businessman. His friends, **Eric**, 33 years old, and **Jeff**, 30 years old, have also been frequent clients of Club 690. They have been friends for more than five

years. They were introduced to each other through common friends. They told me that one thing they have in common is that they are gay (men who prefer other men) and enjoy hopping from one gay bar to another almost every other night. They have been doing this for the past three years already.

When I asked them what makes them gay, all of them said that they prefer having sex with men. They admitted that they are not openly gay, as they disclosed their gender preference among their family members by choice. When I say by choice, the clients decided not to tell their families about their real sexual preferences. In the Philippines, some are closeted (decided not to disclose to their families and friends their preference for men to avoid social stigma) while others are openly gay. The clients were straight-acting and sporting short hair. They liked going to a club like 690 because they want to have sex with the workers there.

They prefer a sex worker who is a stud with manly appearance and behavior. Another requirement is the build — the more buffed a sex worker, the most likely he will be asked for his services. The last requirement would be the sexual act itself. Jeff added that he wanted his sex worker to physically abuse him because he opined that by doing so, like slapping him on the face or softly punching him, would make him a *woman*. Brigs summed it up by saying:

We prefer sex workers who are really men, masculine men without any effeminate or girlish gestures and behavior. We are gay men and we expect them to act like men and show to us that in bed we are like women. Sex workers know that and that is the reason why we pay them.

Sex roles play an important factor in their negotiations with the sex workers. Brigs started by saying that it was essential to

know what the worker can do. Eric, on the other hand, enjoys intimacy with a sex worker. From all indications and narrations with regard to sex roles, it seemed that it is clear that the sexual act is not exclusively determined by economics (getting paid), but also by pleasure.

The clients informed me that sex workers imposed some limitations in sexual services depending on how much they pay. The workers will start negotiating for their price pegged at a minimum of 1,000 pesos (equivalent to 20.00 US dollars). More often than not, the clients pay the workers more than their minimum price.

Based on the aforementioned topic of sex roles in relation to the limitations in sexual services dictated by the sex workers, I can only surmise that in this situation, power play is at work. On one hand, the clients may have the upper hand that with their money, they can dictate what kind of services they would require sex workers to do. On the other hand, sex workers realize that their well-developed bodies are their economic capital, they can set limitations to their roles.

All of the clients admitted that they have developed affections or became in love with sex workers. The workers make them feel like women, they showed concern and sometimes went out on a date with them. While the clients knew consciously that the sex workers were putting this on a charade to maintain them, they nonetheless enjoyed the recognition. What was important for them was that sex workers gave extra efforts by being affectionate to them, not as a gay men, but as persons. When this level of intimacy happens, it goes beyond a client-sex worker relationship and progresses into friendship. As Eric puts it:

We gay men are vulnerable to falling in love with sex workers. It won't be a surprise because they know how to

make us feel important. He would call me for example for no reason at all except to ask me how was my day or even ask me for a date. . . Those simple things matter to me. We feel good when we are wanted by these workers not because of sex only but for companionship or even sharing our thoughts about life.

Sexual health practices were discussed with the clients of the sex workers. Brigs and Eric use protections like condoms.

When I asked the clients how they see the sex workers, all of them said that they are in the business because of easy money. Eric, however, was quick to add that poverty pushed him and his colleagues to be in the business and that they had no other opportunities in life. On the contrary, Brigs said that men are men regardless of sexual orientation. He continued by saying that just because they are sex workers, it does not necessary mean that they do not enjoy sex at all. They like what they are doing and most importantly they are getting paid for it. Jeff remarked —

I believe that men by nature are sexual and sex work is a just a career. This I think is what goes on in the mind of a sex worker. [laughing] Besides, we have been sex workers ourselves one time in our lives [laughing]. We use sex to gain something from someone, right?

Based on the aforementioned quotations, I argue in this thesis that clients, being one social network in the lives of the sex workers, contribute to the understanding of the *pagkatao* of the male sex workers. Without these clients, sex workers would not be able to develop their sexual role and identity based on what is needed in the sex trade. This is to say that from the observation that a male sex worker is enjoying and seeking sex, one can conclude that this makes him a whole person.

The construction of *pagkatao* among sex workers as manifested in the interviews with the clients is a product of three factors — economic (the power to pay), political (power play between a client and a sex worker) and social (ascribed roles in sex acts). Because of the interplay of these factors, sexual identity and or male identity is a result of a *pagkatao*.

On Sexual Orientation

I learned sex from the streets. From the streets, I got to know sex. I was 14 then. I was young and did not know what to do in life. All I wanted was to earn money. I lived with strangers in the city of Manila since I ran away from home. I had to have sex with gay men in order to survive. At 14, I started peddling myself in the street. You couldn't imagine what things these homosexuals did to me! [Said in disgust] I felt I was dirty doing those things. I still remember. . . but look at me now, I am still here. I still sell sex.

These were the words quoted directly from my transcriptions of the interview with Kenzmon. First sexual experience will always remain vivid in the minds of these sex workers. It is through their experiences that they derive their sexual orientations. And these sexual orientations guided them to what they have become now. The first sex experiences of Ariel, Julius and Marvin were based on curiosity. Friends initiated all of the informants to their first sexual experience. Ariel was 19 years old when he did it with his girlfriend, Julius was 17 when he did it with the girl next door while Marvin had sex with his girlfriend when he was in high school. Gerald had a different experience:

I was 16 when my friends and I visited a circus in the poblacion (town). I got attracted to the glitz of the circus.

Someone approached me from behind and it was a man dressed in woman's clothes. He was offering me a free ride in one of those. . . I think it was a ferris wheel. My friends encouraged me to go with him. I did. After that he guided me through a dark pathway. We did what is expected. I allowed myself to have sex with him. I offered small amount of money to him after that sex because I thought that was the "arrangement", he declined and did not take the money.

After experiencing sex for the first time, all of the male sex workers interviewed stated that they were quick to have strings of sexual partners. Ariel, for one, juggled two girlfriends at one time. Both girls did not know that they had the same boyfriend. Marvin was even proud when he told me that because of the color of his skin (brown) and his truly Filipino-looks, he could attract women, old as well as young.

However, what was so glaring in my conversations with them was that they considered having sex with women as a natural thing. Ariel quipped:

It feels good to have sex with a woman, there is romance. Men are for women. With men, this is not the case. I need to imagine that he is a woman. It was only here in the club that I had my first experience with a man.

Most participants viewed sex as a natural act. Marvin said:

That's okay. That's normal. Everybody does it. If someone does not have sex, he/she is abnormal. Sex is important, most especially for us, men. It is what we do best.

While they see sex as natural, the pleasure or satisfaction one derives from it is determined by their liking or by who their partners are. They said that they can go all the way if they like their partners. Julius explained that:

Pleasurable sex has to do with liking your partner. When you like your partner, sex feels so good. If you love someone, you retain your dignity as a person.

However, one of them added the notion that same sex acts can also be pleasurable. Gerald said:

Having sex with another man, that feels good. He knows what I need because he is also a man. However, if you search always for a man, then, you might be gay. In my case, I am not gay. I feel that it is immoral to have a relationship with another man. I am here in this club just for a job.

The foregoing signifies that while for most of the informants having sex with gay men clients is unnatural, this can sometimes turn them on, too. Now that they are sex workers, however, they quickly averred in the course of the interview that pleasure was attained because they imagined that they were having sex with their girlfriends and/or female live-in partners.

This seemingly diverse mindsets regarding sex enable the sex worker to look at his act again solely from the perspective of work. Kenzmon said that with gay men clients/partners, sex is never spontaneous. Everything has to be done within the ambit of their agreed upon contract. Kenzmon added:

It is still natural to have sex with women. Unlike gay men, I feel sexually used because that's my work. It is unnatural for me to look for another man to have sex with. I don't want it because it is not natural. . . it is not what we are here for. . . it's not our biological assignment.

It is likewise interesting to note that for Marvin and Kenzmon, the older participants, pleasure in sex should lead to the formation of families. Sexual acts with women, therefore, are preferred

because women can get pregnant while gay men cannot. This idea can be related to their sexual health and practice. Marvin stated:

When I am with a woman, I don't use a condom because it is not natural to use it. With my male clients, I use a condom because that is not natural. When my male clients insist that I do not wear rubbers, I leave them.

I can deduce from the aforementioned narrations that in the context of Philippine society the masculinity of the informants receive positive reinforcements. The masculinity of their *pagkatao* is valued within the patriarchal culture in which men are socialized. The Catholic religion reinforces male domination and entitlements, legitimates women's oppression and inferiority, and views this as natural and inevitable. This traditional religion, its persistent beliefs and value systems perpetuate the oppressive nature of patriarchy.

For the male sex workers, sexual identity was a major concern. This must have been built from the fact that they know fully well that having paid sex with men in Philippine society is unacceptable and perceived as an aberration. They had to self-identify as males although they consciously know that they render services to other men. They use the language and symbolism that is socially recognized as male or masculine, affirm this male identity by talking about their bodies, their sexual preferences, the libido, and their *pagkatao*.

While in the Philippines, the bipolarity between men and women is often described as egalitarian, males are still accorded a disproportionate share of power that legitimizes their gender privileges as men and the subjugation of women. Thus, it is natural for men to dominate women, unnatural for the same men to physically prefer other men. This view was expressed by

the sex workers in their pleasurable sexual encounters with women and the forced or coerced sex with their gay men clients. Sexual acts borne by sexual orientations of male sex workers have varying significance and meanings. As men, having sex with women is natural. As sex workers, having sex with gay men may be unnatural but they do it for an obvious reason — to gain income. It means that there is no direct relationship among sexual desire, sexual practice and sexual identity. This can be gleaned from their perception that '*a woman is for a man*' and that sexual pleasure can only be had with women.

With sex workers' narratives, it is difficult to simply describe their identity. The data show how they identify themselves, as men and at the same time as sex workers. Their identity is a confluence of diverse factors as well as circumstances within the ambit of their perceived decision-making privileges, as well as of causes beyond their will and control.

As males, they express the characteristics that are often used to describe their *pagkalalaki* or maleness — being responsible, able to hold a job, raise families, love women and raise children. As sex workers, they are all the more male because their use of sex in their work enables them to earn money for themselves as well as for their loved ones.

The very probable multiplicity of their sexual networks and relationships allow them to self-identify as men who are able to support themselves and their families and, if needed, are ready to sell their bodies to earn these means of support. As Kenzmon stated it:

We are here in this business, of selling our bodies, but that does not mean that we are not responsible to ourselves as human beings. We are here to have money and it is the easiest way to get it. We are men — we help our families by sending them money, by having a small business in

order for us to get by. We raise our own families and hope that our children will not experience in the future the hardships we are experiencing now. To say that we also prefer men to have sex with and enjoy it, is not at all true. We are here for a job and this is the best we can do for now.

Our Bodies and Sex Work

As has been established in this study, the male sex worker's perceptions about their sex work rely solely on how they sell their bodies for sex. This fact is understandable considering that gay men and women clients pay for the workers's bodies to attain sexual pleasure and satisfaction. This part of the study explores the relationship of the bodies at work and their personhood.

All the sex workers believed that the desire for easy money was of paramount importance to them. They have also learned to accept the reality that having sex with another male is an easy ploy. Although Julius said:

At first, I could not stand the reality that I was having sex with men. But I struggled against this thought. I could not do anything because this is my work and that was the reason why I still continue to do it. It was my first time to have sex with another man.

Ariel even retorted:

I think that my male clients are satisfied because they enjoyed what I was doing. What they liked was for me romancing them. I was forced to do that because that was what we agreed on before we left the club. Since then, my clients return to me and take me out again. I have regular clients.

All of the informants admitted that there were perks while working in the club. Kenzmon said in confidence:

Of course, it's easy money here. That is what I call opportunities while doing this kind of work. I respect my clients and I don't abuse their kindness or goodness. I have a bisexual man client who sends money to me in the amount of US\$1,000 per month and at the same time a girl client who works in Japan and sends me 100,000 yen or 30,000 pesos a month. Isn't that good opportunity?

Most of the informants maintained that while in the club, they negotiate with their clients the services they are expected to perform. They then quote their price.

Sometimes, these sex workers are able to show-off their bodies being mounted on stage with their very skimpy brief only. But all the informants were quick to claim that they avoid getting emotionally hitched to a customer. While initially hesitant, Gerald said, he debriefs himself of this thought and says to himself—*well, this is just work.*

Ariel said that he knows his limitations and thus checks any or all of his emotions. Some of the informants admitted that it was possible to maintain steady relationships with their male clients, but this can only be possible within the framework of the former supporting their needs and without interfering with their other affairs. However, Kenzmon remained to be in control by saying:

While some of my male clients profess their love for me. I usually say that he does not know me that well yet and therefore could not truly love me. I make it clear to him that this is just work. Gay men clients are like that. They don't understand that while I consented to sit with them in the club, this doesn't necessarily mean I like them. It's just a job.

Julius, the youngest participant in the study, even said that his relationship with his male client is primarily premised on the latter's financial capability and that he uses this money to support his family. Most often, his partner will not agree to this arrangement. He wants only him and not his family. Thus, while he has learned to love one of his benefactors, he left him because he failed to understand his obligation to his family. He adds:

I fell in love with my British client because he was putting effort to make the relationship work. I must have been emotional, too. But when he learned that I was helping my family with the money he provided me, he said that it was not his responsibility to support anyone else. I left him.

It was interesting to note that male clients are usually possessive of their sex worker partners. This must have been premised on the fact that they have economic power over these sex workers. It is the client who dictates what he can and cannot do, where he can go and where he cannot go. Marvin summed this up by saying:

I still have the opinion that gay men customers are not spendthrift. They are ready to give whatever I need even if I don't ask for it in exchange for the attention I give them in return. I think I can say on behalf of the rest of us that we do not abuse our male clients. If they are not giving anything to us, then thank you. If they give us something without us asking for it, then thank you again.

Moreover, Gerald, Kenzmon and Marvin maintained that a steady relationship with their fellow sex workers is not acceptable. I am not surprised by this fact because these three workers are the best among the stable of sex workers in the club. Gerald, Kenzmon and Marvin claimed that some of their fellow workers

swing both ways (meaning they prefer men and women). These fellow workers are often into sex work because they not only need cash but, more importantly, that they also want to. The said that this is not a good arrangement because in the process, the latter takes advantage of the friendship. Marvin said:

It is not uncommon for some of us here to be the object of affection of our fellow sex workers. One will know this because there will be instances where he gives you a towel after your dance routine or put cologne on your body. Later on, I would know that he is a bisexual. I don't like that because it will ruin the friendship.

Further, Kenzmon has developed an eye for determining who among his fellow sex workers is straight (read: heterosexual) or only straight-acting. This must have been the result or outcome of his experience working in the club for several years. Kenzmon said —

I am now able to know who is gay or not among my fellow workers here. Some have even intimated their desire to take me as their boyfriend or live-in partner, but no dice. I have to turn them down. I prefer women.

They pronounced in the interviews that they still prefer women as sexual or steady partners. All of them confirmed that women like them because of their good physical looks. Thus, it has become common for them to maintain relationships with both women partners and gay men clients at the same time. Kenzmon added:

I had relationships with a woman and at the same time with a gay man. My woman client trusts me because she assumes that I will not fall for other women; consequently, my gay man client is comfortable with me knowing that I will not fall for other gays. All is fair in love and sex.

As sex workers, they put a premium on their appearances. Most of the sex workers interviewed adorn their bodies with tattoos. They also wear earrings. They opined that their looks are enhanced by these adornments. However, Ariel said that he dislikes his tattoos now because he doesn't look clean with them.

When finally asked whether it is possible for them to become gay because of their continuing relationships with gay clients, Marvin said that he does not think so because what they are doing is only part of what they call work. Gerald and Kenzmon added that this is the reason why they maintain an emotional distance from their gay men clients. Ariel stated:

Frankly, I am afraid that I might become gay. This is the reason why I always have in mind that I am doing this only for the perks. Otherwise, I might become gay.

The other informant expressed a fatalistic attitude as to what he will become in the future if he continues with this type of work. Julius said —

Life is like that. Whatever will happen to me in the future, I will have to be prepared for it.

Finally, all of them said "I am still a man". They insisted that they still prefer having sex with women, may it be women clients or girlfriends/wives.

Their perceptions about their sex work reflect how they practice sexual health. During the interviews, I could not avoid to touch this topic. For the informants, there was a connection between what they do as sex workers and what they perceive as safe sexual practices. Many prevention programs in the country addressing the need to promote the sexual health of male sex workers have emphasized the messages of safer sexual practices and condom use. However, I believe that these efforts have failed

to take into account strategies that carry relevant sensitive messages, particularly sexual decision-making and practices. Thus, these programs have failed to develop among these men skills to ensure protection.

Most of the informants claimed that it was important for them and consistent with their type of work to develop their physical bodies, as this was their chief merchandise. Most of them said also that while they were consenting to have sex with gay men, they impose certain limitations to the type of sexual service they will render. On the other hand, they tend to be more liberal (no limitations/no restrictions) with their female partners.

Asked how they protect themselves from possible infection from their male partners, they retorted that they choose their clients well. Not only should their partners look and act decent, they should also appear and smell clean. Louie, the floor manager confirmed this view by saying —

Our customers or clients usually prefer sex workers who look clean. . . like students. Most want their sex workers well built and buffed. The boys want their would-be clients to look clean and decent, too.

It can be said that this preference for one who looks clean has been equated by both sex workers and clients to not being sick or capable of transmitting diseases. When asked if they use the condom to protect themselves, Kenzmon, Marvin and Ariel insist that they wear it. Kenzmon said:

Since I don't want to contract any disease, I just leave my clients (who refuse condoms).

With women partners, however, they seldom use the condom. Ariel rationalized by saying —

With a woman, especially when I like her, I don't use condoms. I prefer it that way.

The *pagkatao* of the informants stemmed from notion of the powerful symbol of their maleness. However, with regard to circumstances in terms of sex work, it is different. With gay men clients, sex is an economic tool. With women, sex is both for pleasure and procreation.

There are other symbolic interpretation of parts of the body made by the informants. Some of them are as follows:

- (1) that body fluids like semen can mean both reproduction (family life) and trade (sex work)
- (2) that body tattooing and other body improvements can mean both pleasure (for woman and gay men clients) and self-esteem (i.e., confidence, persona).
- (3) that physical development of the body, i.e., being muscled or buffed, can mean additional leverage of their marketability.

These symbolic meanings are reflected in their culture of sex. I saw these mental symbols through their body reflections while looking at their dances as a form of a ritual. Their rituals are like celebrations of their sexuality and their bodies communicate sexual meanings. Bodies are interwoven into symbols and meanings in several ways, for example:

- (1) the body as an *individual* body capable of being developed to the extent of enduring pain and pleasure such as tatoos or other personal imprints.
- (2) the body as a *political* body that uses its power to be traded to the clients, a body that can be controlled (e.g., body decorations) and be in control, and a body that regulates and selects (e.g., to whom this body goes — male or female clients).

- (3) the body as an *economic* body to gain income.
- (4) the body as a *social* body that acts within the context of social relationships and affiliations with clients, fellow sex workers, families, friends and lovers.

When watching the bodies of these sex workers and relating this to the transcripts of my interviews, I was struck by how they could separate their *pagkatao*, their personhood of being men desiring and loving women from their work as sex workers. I can only surmise that *pagkatao* is a result of the Filipino concepts of *loob* and *labas*.

These concepts state that *loob* (inside one's mind or being) is the result of the conscious structuring in the mind in accordance to what society prescribes. Society's prescriptions are cultural norms such as *what is right* and *what is morally good*. As Filipinos, we follow these norms in order to be accepted and to co-exist with other Filipinos. This proceeds from both an utilitarian and an egalitarian disposition. The *labas* (outside actions) is expressed overtly in the language and behaviour of the individual as soon as he confronts real life situation.

The interplay between *labas* and *loob* is what one uses when he sexually self identifies. Thus, for instance, while the informants maintain an almost neutral emotional involvement with gay men clients and dislike paid receptive anal sexual intercourse, they claim that their sexual behaviours do not necessarily reflect their real *pagkatao*. This means that they are able to distinguish sex for money and sex for pleasure.

Because of the use of the Filipino concept of *labas*, the informants have developed a mental template that determines how they understand their "world". In relation to their sex work, the participants were clear in describing sexual behaviours through labels. Here is a list of all terms that were used by the participants during my fieldwork.

<i>Label</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>Lalakeng-lalake</i>	Male sex workers who are men, masculine in dress, also in manner and speech. With regard to sex, he is exclusively in command. The biological sex of the partner is female.
<i>Lalake</i>	Male sex workers who are men, masculine in dress, also in manners and speech, but who can have sexual activities with both gay men and women clients.
<i>Bahid/Pa-men</i>	Male sex workers who dress masculine and are (heterosexual) straight-acting. The biological sex of the partner varies but the preference is for male partners.
<i>Silahista</i>	Male sex workers who swing both ways. They can be straight-acting at one time and effeminate at another time depending on their clients. The biological sex of the partner is not important.
<i>Bading/Bakla</i>	Male sex workers who are gay and work exclusively for gay men clients (mostly foreigners). The biological sex of the partner is strictly male.
<i>Pa-girl</i>	Male sex workers who dress and speak like women. They inject estrogen to their bodies to possess feminine characteristics and behaviors. The biological sex of the partner is strictly male.

These labels, used by sex workers to identify themselves and their sexual practices, manifest a certain degree of unfixedness and fluency. They are typical for Filipino male sex workers. There is a very wide range of possible sexual acts and partners for most of the sex workers. The social acceptability of being male in the

Philippines is the main factor of behavior, thus, the acknowledgment that they are men because, despite their sexual relations with other men, they still prefer women. Coming from the perspective of *pagkatao*, therefore, the distinction between his self-identity and his actual sexual behavior does not lead him to doubt his masculinity or have guilt feelings.

This points to the fact that sex roles (male or female sexual activities) play a more important function in their self-identification than the biological sex of their partners. Of course, we can say with certainty that what actually happens behind closed doors between two individuals can be enigmatic.

The informants interviewed did not show any guilt feelings for having sex with men. They rationalize it by saying that they do it in exchange for money. Only two participants, Julius and Ariel, admitted experiencing pleasure while having sex with men.

The feeling of superiority over their female and male clients among the sex workers in this study is an outcome of the definition of their sexuality in terms of what they need. The narratives that have been gathered for this study were not wanting in what these men clamored for. They wanted to show that they were in control of themselves and their sexual activities. This was expressed in their relations with women. Among their male clients, however, they manifested an ambivalent posture — sometimes contradictory, often congruent with their internalized sexual beliefs (*loob*). Thus sometimes, they denigrate their male clients by appending the label *bakla* (effeminate homosexual). This was exemplified further when Kenzmon said:

Pay me well and I will give you the pleasure that you want. Don't even say you love me, you don't know me that well.

Thus, using the *labas* concept, the sex workers' view that when they succumb to their clients' desires, they have to rein-

vent their sexuality to fit the situation. However, whatever these sex workers have learned to internalize as their sexual beliefs or as *loob*, produces an ambivalence in what they think is right (*loob*) and what they do in bed (*labas*). These powerful internal conflicts were obvious in the sexual decision and acts that they made.

When participants have sex with women, and were thus true to their socialization and internalized beliefs, sexuality was a source of pleasure. When they responded to the needs of their gay men partners, the desire of their partners was a source of conflict, which they tried to resolve by staying passive in the act and by imposing limitations to what they can do.

These participants clearly were engaged in an internal debate with themselves, the *loob* vs. *labas*. This engagement, this struggle to reconcile what to them was incongruent to their desired sexuality is a market that these men were actively transforming themselves by constructing and reconstructing their sexuality, from what they perceive as shameful to something which they think is not only pleasurable but acceptable. Thus, at that instance, these men tried their best to possess power and control over their sexuality. It is interesting to note that in the narratives, these men attempted to show the importance of assuming an active role in the construction of their own sexuality.

These sex workers take the position that sexual desire and pleasure should not be drawn from the bodies of other men, otherwise, they have to reject their own sexuality and be transformed into men liking other men. They project that the source of their own pleasure and that of their client is solely based on the contract that they have entered into. And that while they can become aroused with their gay men clients, they should not lose control of their power as men.

A sex worker's economic well-being takes precedence over his own or his clients' pleasure. Since both of them are men,

their sexual interaction pits them in an arena where the fulfillment of men's sexual desires and needs is celebrated. The power that he possesses over his gay man client is in his proportional and well-built body, the merchandise. Gay man's power is purely economic; he pays for sex. He can buy and consume it. He has the privilege because money entitles him to have sex with someone he chooses to be with. By defining their sexuality in terms of what they need, they think that what they do is socially acceptable. They are not falling in love. This may be a forced choice that both make, but this pressure, this ambivalence is what makes the sexual act pleasurable. Coerced into having sex with men, they have attempted to make sense out of their sexual experiences.

Sexual behavior is a form of currency; it is a metaphor derived from the accounts of the informants of this study. Sexual activity can be seen as a reward, a source of love or a source of material gain. Sex for the sex workers was equated with the material reward that they can obtain from the clients that they have.

As sexuality for male sex workers involved in this study draws mainly from their self concept about what they want and what gives pleasure to their partners, it is important to look at how these men protect themselves from the perilous effects of infection or disease. Because these men are pressured into intimacy with their partners, they often leave to chance the need for sexually healthy practices.

As mentioned earlier, as conquerors and givers of desire, their basic motivation is based on their decision to satisfy their partners' desires and needs. In paid sex, and because they are coerced by circumstances to give importance to their sexual capabilities, sex workers sometimes use the freedom of the "four walls" of the bedroom or the space beneath the sheets to express what should have been regulated or prohibited culturally. In the silence of

the private and hidden encounters, anything can happen, everything is possible.

Conclusion

To fully comprehend the *pagkatao* of male sex workers, there is a need to understand the dynamics of —

- a. their sexual orientation — their first sexual experience with females as a ‘natural process’ and with males as sexual exploration and to some extent as forced or coerced sex;
- b. the shifts in their sexualities and identities — preference for women clients over male clients and the notion that women are for procreation and men are for economic sustainability; and,
- c. the interpretation of their body which is based on economic, social and political needs.

All of the factors mentioned above are interwoven under the ambit of (sex) work. The multiplicity of the sexual networks (clients, floor managers and fellow workers) that sex workers are able to establish reflects that their *pagkatao* is also multi-faceted —one which is both socially acceptable (e.g., strictly as sex workers) and personally satisfying (e.g., income from sex work).

The Filipino concepts of *loob* and *labas* of their *pagkatao* proved useful for a better understanding of their “culture of sex”. Aided by cultural prescriptions, the informants in this study pointed to a glaring fact that sex work is morally bad (*loob*) and that continuing doing sex work is only for economic reasons (*labas*). This has been possible because of their ability to construct and reconstruct themselves on the basis of what they need — sex for pleasure or sex for material gain.

However, in this study, the ambivalence of their *pagkatao* is a process. This means that their sexuality is at most transitory,

utilitarian and multiple, a way of adopting to the pressures of social norms. It is, nonetheless, difficult to imagine sex workers—as individuals—completely devoid of some intuitive perceptions of themselves. These workers are endowed with a self-consciousness of mind and body, with an internal image of themselves and a sense of body self-awareness.

The culture of sex and sex work contributed largely to their *pagkatao*. This means that these sex workers are acting within the context of their social relationships with clients, floor managers and fellow workers. Their individuality and their social identity as sex workers are two sides of the coin. For this reason, sex workers celebrate their sexuality.

Most of the men in the study manifested the powerful symbolism of their beautiful bodies, of the adornments that make them more attractive to their clients. Their goal is to make what they do—not only a source of personal pleasure, but an activity that is socially acceptable and consistent with their mind frame (e.g., being males).

A symbolic-cognitive perspective provides an efficient framework in explaining the capacity of these men to accept their sexual networks and subsequently their sexual activities and the appreciation of their work-related reality. In their sexual relationships with gay clients, it was imperative for sex workers to share these realities of themselves with their clients. This comes to fore in the negotiation and the contract that they enter into with them that they conclude. For most of the male sex workers in the study, this process by which they are able to share their contexts and meanings of sex work with their partners is one of the possible explanations for their ability to confront the discrepancy and ambivalence between their beliefs (*loob*) and behaviours (*labas*). For most of the male sex workers, the pressure to have sex with someone of their own biological sex in

exchange for perceived returns was their way of overcoming the pressures from their society. In a word, they are able to legitimize their behaviour.

In conclusion, this reality is important when one designs appropriate health intervention programs for sex workers. As the dominant partner, they can and must dictate how sex can be both pleasurable and safe. Engaging in safer sexual practices is a practical decision that stems from their desire to continuously use their body in what they do best. This means that they must be convinced that their sexuality, being a result of their *pagkatao* and manifested in their sexual behaviours, should not be sacrificed for immediate financial reward, pleasure or even love. The message that must be conveyed to them is that as an active body-mind self, interacting consciously with social contexts and realities, they must stay healthy.

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