

The Unknown World of Male Masseurs

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Abstract

Massage as a camouflage for prostitution using the online dating application is one of the rarely explored topics. This qualitative study, in the form of a narrative, presents a comprehensive story of the lives and situational experiences, vulnerabilities, and resiliencies of five freelance male sex masseurs. Using a narrative approach involves inquiry directed at narratives of human experience or inquiry that produces data in a narrative (Creswell, 2013). This study highlights the participants' motivation and exposure to engage as a sex massage therapist. The study revealed that participants had varying reasons for entering this kind of career; the common denominator in offering extra service was that they came from poor families, were abused victims, and had low academic performance. The love for their families, easy money above all, a personal choice motivates them to engage in sex massage. For most participants, part of their motivation is the economic benefit, which bolsters the position of an economic necessity to alleviate their financial conditions. Further, their current personal circumstances, specifically the lack of job opportunities due to their educational attainment, limit their choices of profession.

Keywords: *extra service, prostitution, narrative inquiry, sex massage, male masseur, online sex work*

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Introduction

This study was conducted to reveal the unknown world of male masseurs to shed light on this kind of sex trade, masked as a legitimate profession, and the kind of lives they live to understand their individual life stories better specifically the participants' personal and social circumstances in engaging to extra service; and, motivations and exposure in engaging as a sex massage therapist.

Freelance male masseurs looked for other ways to attract clients by using the male-exclusive online application offering "extra service." "Extra service" refers to sexual services in addition to body massage in exchange for money or goods. This "extra service" could be classified as prostitution, sex for livelihood, usually paid in cash. It includes not only regular intercourse but also any form of sexual contact with another person for a fee.

With the practices and scenario, this study explored the socio-cultural narratives on sex massage therapy so that male masseurs can tell stories about their experiences, vulnerabilities, and resiliencies in massage prostitution. The researcher believed that men who offered "extra service" are in a liminal space as a socio-cultural narrative emphasizes men's sexuality.

Therefore, male masseurs' personal characteristics, stories, life experiences, outcome expectations, and expectancies, and whether they practice alone or with others, may be related to their behavior. Studying the characteristics of male masseurs may shed light on their struggles and challenges.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative research design. Qualitative inquiry provides a good fit for this particular study- the lives of male masseurs, given its ability to help researchers who "are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam, 2009). This study is grounded in narrative inquiry to elicit the critical tales that depict the male masseur's experiences. Narrative inquiry is a methodology gaining attention in qualitative research (Kim, 2011).

Five (5) participants were selected using purposeful, maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2002). Each of the five (5) participants was given a pseudonym to protect their personal identity. The participants in this study consisted of five (5) male masseurs. In identifying the participants

for this study, non-probability sampling. The study was conducted in the province of Aklan, specifically Boracay Island, which is the location of the participants.

According to Bryman and Bell (2007), ethical considerations can be specified as one of the most important parts of research. Friesen *et al.* (2014) seven important ethical issues was considered: a) informed consent; b) voluntary participation; c) do not harm; d) confidentiality; e) anonymity, and f) only access relevant components.

An interview guide translated into the local language (Tagalog and Aklanon) was used in the face-to-face interview to gather information about the participants. The researcher asked the questions as worded and sequenced in the interview guide. A voice recorder or a voice interview was used to validate the transcript with the participants' consent.

In this qualitative study, the primary data-gathering method involves primarily in-depth interviews with participants (Creswell, 2007). There were two private conversational in-depth interview sessions with the researcher. The first session involved an hour-and-a-half face-to-face interview regarding their stories, experiences, involvement, and exposure to sex massage. The second session involved any follow-up questions and a review of the first session transcript. This session lasted approximately one hour. Questions were asked in the local language that the participants understood and were conveniently used during the conversations. This is to let the participants express themselves fully.

Narrative analysts may use one of four approaches (Butina, 2015). The most common of the four approaches is narrative, and thematic analysis within the text is the primary focus; therefore, this was the study's approach. The narrative, thematic analysis process used in this study consisted of five stages: (a) organization and preparation of the data, (b) obtaining a general sense of the information, (c) the coding process, (d) categories or themes, and (e) interpretation of the data (Singer, 2004).

All of the information collected from this study is confidential. The recorded voice interview was reviewed only by the researcher and a professional transcriber who agreed to keep the information confidential. The interview transcripts were coded, the researcher kept a separate master list with the names of participants, and the corresponding code numbers or pseudonyms were used. Once the data were collected and analyzed, the master list was destroyed. The recorded

voice interviews were destroyed after they were transcribed. Transcribed transcripts were saved to a CD-ROM or flash drive and retained for at least three years, kept in the researchers' position.

Creswell (2013) recommends that researchers utilize at least two strategies in any study. Strategies promoting credibility (internal validity) begin with the utilization of member-checking, next, this study was submitted to a panel of experts as an expert audit review, last, the researcher's biases will be clarified in the study. A strategy used for consistency (reliability) was the documentation of an audit trail which is the authentication of the study's findings by following the trail or steps of the researcher. Strategies promoting transferability (external validity) included providing detailed, thick descriptions. The term thick description is "a highly descriptive, detailed presentation of the setting and, in particular, the study's findings" (Merriam, 2009). A description of the research participants and presented findings with supporting evidence presented as narrative quotes.

Findings

The participants have varying reasons why they entered this kind of career; nonetheless, the common denominator was that they came from low-income families, were victims of abuse, had low academic achievement, and it was a personal choice. These situations pushed them to find financial means to support their needs and families, even if it was considered immoral and frowned upon by society.

The common factor that pushed the participants to be sex massage therapists was love for their families. Based on the participants' responses, they verbally expressed that their families were the main concern about why they entered sex work. Through their extra service, they could feed their families, support their siblings' studies and needs, and at least make their lives comfortable.

Another factor that made them continue with this profession is the growing demand for masseurs with extra service on the Island, which they saw as an opportunity to be professional masseurs but simultaneously continue with the extra service they provide. Relatively, their financial issues will be addressed.

The unfortunate experiences they encountered during childhood also allowed them to be exposed to this kind of profession which later led to them offering extra services. Given that they were financially in need, the reality of them being encouraged to enter this profession was high, even if it was considered indecent.

Implications

The three theories used in has proven strong support for the results of the study. The culture of poverty has laid down poverty as a motivation to earn a living and survive hunger and education for their family members. They have been inclined to earn money at all causes. The psychosexual theory has led the participants to choose how to answer the call of poverty. Prompted by their sexual experience of abuse in the past, their craving for sexual pleasure and the easy money in extra service has been the perfect reason why they chose to engage in the king of the profession. Finally, the social cognitive theory lays down the foundation that strengthens the participant's professional stay. The presence of the circle of friends and the networks they were able to make has led to their protection to survive the world they chose.

The results of this study conform with the understanding regarding the Culture of Poverty that the most common reason for engaging into sex work concerned the financial benefits that this job affords them. In this study, sex massage participants earned more money and had more financial security.

On the other hand, Psychosexual Theory has a significant connection as results revealed that most participants enjoyed being male-sex masseurs; they cited some advantages and improvements resulting from their occupation. Male masseurs displayed physical or emotional intimacy with their clients. This implies the development of close friendship between them—a development of love and cares for a friend without the shadow of guilt and fear. The level of physical and emotional intimacy between the male sex masseur and his client is highly developed.

Finally, the social cognitive theory relates to the findings that most of the participants have positive improvements in their psychological health in terms of increased self-esteem, self-confidence, and the ability of the work to reduce feelings of depression and isolation. In contrast, some participants reported that they felt being used, depressed, or with a feeling of inner guilt.

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