

Male sex workers are often well-educated and middle class, finds researcher

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In a new Ph.D. thesis from Lund University in Sweden, gender studies

researcher Marco Bacio interviewed male sex workers in Sweden and Italy. What surprised him the most was that a majority of the sex workers were well-educated—and middle class.

Female sex work is far more common than male sex work, and so is research about the same topic. According to Marco Bacio, however, we know less about men who sell sex. Now he has contributed to the field with in-depth interviews with 45 men who sell sex to other men, in Milan and in Stockholm.

"I knew very little about this before I started doing research myself. My image was based on a stereotype; that everyone who sold sex felt bad and that they were forced into prostitution. Therefore, it surprised me that so many were well-educated and [middle class](#)," he says.

Marco Bacio challenges the mainstream view by arguing that sex work, at least male sex work, can actually be viewed as almost any job. The vast majority stated money as the [driving force](#) for selling sex, while a few stated other reasons, such as lust.

"The sex workers told us that the meeting with the buyer often did not consist of just sex. They saw each other for a few hours, had a coffee, and chatted a bit about everyday things," says Marco Bacio.

In female sex work, there is often talk of the risk of violence when meeting a client. Does not the same apply to male sex workers?

"My [interviewees](#) did not mention violence at all. It may have to do with the fact that two men are often physically equally strong," says Bacio.

Today, almost all contacts are initiated via the internet, and Marco Bacio believes that this is important for those who start selling.

"Prostitution is often stigmatized, and the threshold for selling sex has been lowered when you do not have to pick up customers on the street," he says.

Unlike when women sell sex, it is the buyer who is most stigmatized when it comes to male prostitution. The typical client is a 45-year-old man who is married with children. According to the sex workers who were interviewed, the motive for buying sex is usually to experience intimacy with another man. Sex is not necessarily an important part of the sex worker-client relationship, although it is generally included.

The interviewees also distinguished between "regular customers" and occasional customers. The temporary customers are more interested in sex and being sexually satisfied, while the "regular customers" are looking for more of an emotional exchange and to create a form of intimacy with the sex worker.

Marco Bacio has analyzed sex work from the perspective of masculinity. He wants to understand the nature of the relationship that is created between sex workers and their clients and how this relationship is characterized by what is perceived as masculine.

"The [sex workers](#) see themselves as 'straight' or 'homosexual' depending on the role they have in the [sexual relationship](#). The one who gets penetrated is considered gay, and the one who penetrates is considered straight," says Marco Bacio. He believes that the degree of stigmatization depends on whether the sex worker is considered gay or straight. Therefore, it has been important for those who sell sex to state that they are actually straight. In recent years, however, it has become more common to define oneself as gay.

More information: Thesis (in Swedish): [Masculinities at work. Male-to-male internet escorting in Italy and Sweden](#)

Provided by Lund University

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