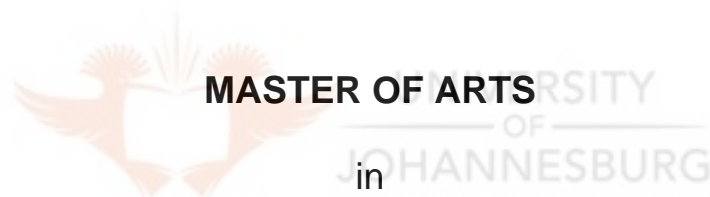


**WOMEN'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE NICE GUY PARADOX: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY**

by

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SUMMARY

The *Nice Guy Paradox* is a provocative perception that is commonly expressed within society and the mass media. According to this perception, nice guys are less successful in their relationships with women than other men. The *Nice Guy Paradox* causes much frustration and confusion for self-proclaimed nice guys. In addition, the implications of this perception may negatively influence the way in which men relate to women. For instance, the *Nice Guy Paradox* implies that if men want to be successful with women, they should not be nice guys.

In the last 15 years, a few psychological studies have opted to focus on the *Nice Guy Paradox*. These studies are almost all quantitative in nature. In fact, a literature search only found one small qualitative study devoted to this topic. Most of the existing research on the *Nice Guy Paradox* attempts to answer the question “*Do nice guys really finish last?*” in the absence of exploratory research aimed at better understanding this perception. For this reason, most existing research on the *Nice Guy Paradox* can be argued to be somewhat presumptuous and its usefulness in trying to understand this phenomenon is questionable.

In an attempt to compensate for the shortcomings of existing research on the *Nice Guy Paradox*, this study endeavors to capture the unique experience of this social phenomenon through the utilization of a phenomenological method of inquiry. In this way, this research attempts to yield a fresh and foundational understanding of the *Nice Guy Paradox*.

Three female university students were sourced and interviewed for the purposes of this study. These participants had all had relationship experience, as well as experience of the *Nice Guy Paradox* at the time of the interviews. In order to obtain optimally rudimentary experiences of the *Nice Guy Paradox*, open-ended interviews were conducted. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and non-verbal cues were indicated where necessary. These

transcriptions constitute the raw data of the study. They were analyzed using a specific phenomenological, stepwise method.

The data analysis produced central themes that were discussed in relation to literature findings in order to consolidate their validity and to position the findings of this study in relation to existing theory and research. On the basis of these central themes, an essential structure of the participants' experiences of the *Nice Guy Paradox* was synthesized. According to this structure, the *nice guys* referred to by the *Nice Guy Paradox* characteristically lack confidence, try too hard to please women and are submissive in relationships. These men are mistreated and rejected by women for the following reasons. Firstly, *nice guys* allow themselves to be mistreated because of their submissive tendencies. Secondly, relationships with these men are not challenging and exciting. Thirdly, women find *nice guy* characteristics irritating and frustrating. Fourthly, *nice guys* lack certain characteristics including dominance, strength, physical attractiveness, confidence, leadership and social status, which women find attractive.

Also according to this structure, the *Nice Guy Paradox* applies more strongly to younger people than older people. In addition, niceness in isolation is a desirable trait in a man. However, the other *nice guy* characteristics are unattractive to women.

This research holds value since it constitutes the first comprehensive phenomenological, insight-orientated study on the *Nice Guy Paradox*. On the basis of the new understanding that this study yields, recommendations with regard to practical application have been put forward. In addition, suggestions for future research have been provided.

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CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION, MOTIVATION AND OBJECTIVES

This chapter begins by providing some background information on the *Nice Guy Paradox* in order to orientate the reader. It proceeds with a brief motivation for this research and outlines the study's broad objectives. This chapter goes on to discuss the possible value of the current research and provides an overview of the study.

1.1 Orientation with regard to the Nice Guy Paradox

The *Nice Guy Paradox* refers to the perception that nice guys finish last with women. This provocative perception is commonly expressed within society and the mass media. For instance, examples of the sentiment that nice guys finish last can be found readily in the popular press and multiple internet sites are devoted to this topic (Urbaniak & Kilmann, 2003).

In the last 15 years, a few psychological studies have opted to focus on this perception. This reflects the fact that in recent times, the *Nice Guy Paradox* has become something of a social phenomenon. It also reflects the idea that people wish to understand this perception better.

As the following chapter will attempt to demonstrate, research performed thus far relating to the *Nice Guy Paradox* is limited with respect to its usefulness in trying to understand this phenomenon. This relates to the motivation behind the current study.

1.2 Motivation for the study

There is a scarcity of research on the *Nice Guy Paradox*. In fact, while there are a few quantitative studies on this perception, only one small qualitative study has been found.

Most of the existing research attempts to answer the question “*Do nice guys really finish last?*” in the absence of exploratory research aimed at better understanding the *Nice Guy Paradox*. This raises questions about the extent to which these studies are useful in trying to understand this social phenomenon. The present study attempts to address the shortcomings in the existing body of research (to some extent) by investigating the subjective experience of the *Nice Guy Paradox* from a phenomenological perspective.

Due to its paradoxical nature, the *Nice Guy Paradox* is an interesting research topic. In addition, it may be having a negative social impact on society, which makes it an important research topic. For instance, this perception causes much frustration and confusion for self-proclaimed nice guys (Urbaniak & Kilmann, 2003). Perhaps more importantly though, it has implications that may negatively influence the way in which men relate to women. For example, it implies that in order to be successful with women, men must not be nice guys.



1.3 Aims and objectives of the study

This study aims to better understand the *Nice Guy Paradox* by using a phenomenological method of inquiry. From the participants’ experiences of the *Nice Guy Paradox*, the research aims to discriminate relevant meaning units and identify central themes. By discussing these themes in relation to relevant literature, it aims to synthesize a fresh understanding of this phenomenon. On the basis of these themes, it aims to describe the essential structure of the participants’ experiences of the *Nice Guy Paradox*. This study aims to make recommendations for future research in relation to its findings.

1.4 Possible value of the study

This study constitutes the first comprehensive phenomenological, insight-orientated research on the *Nice Guy Paradox*. It attempts to gain a rich understanding of the participants’ essential experiences of the *Nice Guy*

Paradox. The pursuit of such understanding has been largely ignored by prior research.

The phenomenological approach utilized by this study may provide new insight with respect to this commonly held perception. Such insight may be helpful when trying to understand established research on the *Nice Guy Paradox*. In addition, it could inspire, inform and direct future research in this area of investigation. Hopefully, the findings of this study will serve as foundational knowledge on the basis of which new hypotheses and research initiatives will be conceptualized.

The insight gained from this study may even have some practical application. For instance, a fresh understanding of the *Nice Guy Paradox* may help to address the potentially negative impact of this social phenomenon.

1.5 Overview of the study

The current chapter, **Chapter 1**, orientates the reader with regard to the topic and provides some motivation for the study. It also discusses the broad objectives of the research and provides an overview of the study. **Chapter 2** introduces and defines the *Nice Guy Paradox*. It goes on to discuss theoretical literature and prior research that relates to this social phenomenon. **Chapter 3** introduces, discusses and provides a justification for phenomenology as a research method. In addition, the first few sections of this chapter include discussions on methodology, as well as quantitative and qualitative approaches to research. **Chapter 4** focuses on the general procedure followed during this research. It outlines general and specific aims, and details procedure with reference to participants, interviews and data analysis. It also includes a discussion on the validity of the phenomenological research method. **Chapters 5-7** introduce the respective participants and provide analyses of their interviews. These analyses conclude with descriptions of the essential structures of their experiences of the *Nice Guy Paradox*. **Chapter 8** develops central themes and discusses these themes in relation to relevant research, theory and phenomenological concepts. On the

basis of these themes, the essential structure of the participants' experiences of the *Nice Guy Paradox* is described. **Chapter 9** makes practical recommendations on the basis of the research findings. In addition, it evaluates the study and provides suggestions for future research.



CHAPTER 2

THE NICE GUY PARADOX

This chapter discusses the available literature relating to women's mate preferences and the *Nice Guy Paradox*. It begins by introducing the *Nice Guy Paradox* and discussing some of the theoretical literature on attraction and romantic relationships. It then discusses the definition of the *Nice Guy Paradox*. Following this, it reviews the general literature on women's mate preferences in relation to the *Nice Guy Paradox*. Finally, it considers the research that has focused directly on the *Nice Guy Paradox*.

2.1 An introduction to the Nice Guy Paradox

According to proponents of the *Nice Guy Paradox*, nice guys finish last with women. Irrespective of its truth, this provocative perception is commonly expressed within society and the mass media. According to this perception, whilst women might say that they want relationships with nice guys, the opposite is reflected in their actual dating behaviour (Herold & Milhausen, 1999; Urbaniak & Kilmann; 2003). In other words, according to the *Nice Guy Paradox*, nice guys are actually at a disadvantage relative to other, less-nice guys, when it comes to romantic relationships with women.

The current study aims to provide insight with regard to the reason/s for the existence of the perception that nice guys finish last. It could be argued that the *Nice Guy Paradox* is just a perception that does not accurately reflect reality. However, it is more difficult to explain how and why this perception has acquired the status of *common knowledge* within society. It seems somewhat counter-intuitive that niceness could actually be unattractive to women, and the fact that this perception is expressed so commonly makes the *Nice Guy Paradox* an interesting social phenomenon.

In addition, the existence of the *Nice Guy Paradox* may have negative social implications. The perception causes much frustration and confusion for self-proclaimed nice guys, who cannot understand how being nice could actually be putting them at a disadvantage (Urbaniak & Kilmann, 2003). Perhaps more importantly though, it has implications that may negatively influence the way in which men relate to women. These implications are strongly reflected in some of the relationship advice given to men, by men. For example, the researcher has often heard sayings such as “treat ‘em mean to keep ‘em keen” being passed between male peers. This saying clearly reflects the idea that in order to be successful with women, men must not be nice guys. Thus, the perception that nice guys finish last, could be having a negative impact on the well being of relationships within society.

In order to better understand the reasons behind the existence of the *Nice Guy Paradox*, it may be useful to try and gain an in-depth understanding of the *Nice Guy Paradox* itself. This goal is the focus of the current study.

The following section discusses literature on attraction in relation to the *Nice Guy Paradox*.

2.2 Theoretical literature on romantic relationships and attraction

The researcher was unable to find relationship theory dealing directly with the *Nice Guy Paradox*. Thus, the sections that follow focus on a few general theories with regard to romantic relationships and attraction. The researcher has attempted (where possible) to relate these theories to the *Nice Guy Paradox*.

2.2.1 Self-disclosure and attraction

Petersen (2004) discusses a common view that emphasizes the importance of self-disclosure in early relationships. Through this generally reciprocal self-disclosure, intimacy is thought to develop. As individuals disclose of themselves, they allow others to understand them better. However, by doing

this, they also allow themselves to become vulnerable, by opening themselves to exploitation.

While this theory may have some merit, it does not seem to relate obviously to the perception that nice guys finish last with women. Thus, application of this theory to the *Nice Guy Paradox* would be highly speculative.

2.2.2 Similarity and attraction

People are thought to be more likely to form close relationships, and to be happy in relationships with people that are similar to themselves (Fitness, Fletcher & Overall, 2007). This theory suggests that nice guys should be attractive to women that view themselves as being similarly nice, but does not really offer an explanation of the *Nice Guy Paradox*.

2.2.3 Dissonance theory and attraction

It has been suggested that dissonance theory may have some application to romantic attraction (Walster, Walster, Pliavin & Schmidt, 2003). This theory predicts that if one must expend great energy to attain a goal, one is usually appreciative of the goal. Similarly, it is argued that if an unusual amount of effort is required to attain a person's affection, that person may be aggrandized as a way of justifying this effort. In light of this theory, it might be argued that nice guys tend to be undervalued as a result of showing their affection too easily. These men might get taken for granted due to the fact that they do not withhold their affection, kindness and niceness. On the other hand, it may be more difficult and rare to obtain less-nice guys' affection. As a consequence of this, these guys may tend to be relatively aggrandized by women, and may be viewed as being more attractive than nice guys. Therefore, dissonance theory might contribute to an explanation of the *Nice Guy Paradox*.

2.2.4 Sternberg's triangular theory of love and attraction

Sternberg (1986) proposes a triangular theory of love (see Figure 1). He argues that love is made up of three components, namely, intimacy, passion and decision/commitment. According to this theory, the amount of love that one experiences depends on the absolute strength of these three components, and the type of love that one experiences depends on their strengths relative to one another.

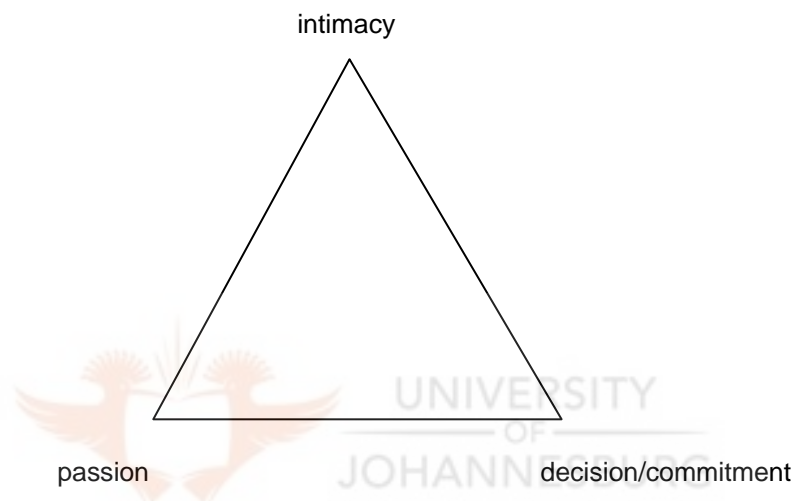


Figure 1. An illustration of Sternberg's (1986) triangular theory of love.

This theory does not seem to relate to the *Nice Guy Paradox* in any obvious way. However, it provides a useful way of conceptualizing love and as the following section demonstrates, may have some application in combination with other theory.

2.2.5 Love as a process of reducing uncertainty and attraction

Livingston (1980) argues for love as a process of reducing uncertainty. He claims that from the beginning phases of romantic involvement, uncertainty has a part to play. Questions like "Does he find me attractive?", "Would she have dinner with me?" and "What is he really like?" reflect this uncertainty. According to Livingston (1980), the general effects of uncertainty, including physiological arousal and relatively greater attention to and conversation with

the person responsible for the uncertainty, are not inconsistent with the components of romantic love. In fact, Livingston (1980) argues that the uncertainties that characterize relationships of attraction and romantic feeling contribute in major ways to the romantic experience. The inevitable reduction of these uncertainties as a relationship progresses is argued to be a pleasurable process, but is thought to result in a corresponding decline with respect to feelings of passion, arousal and focused attention. Uncertainties are thought to shift and change as the relationship develops, and this is thought to maintain some level of passion. However, it is theorized, that people feel most passionate when uncertainty is high during the beginning stages of relationships, as well as during times when the continuation of the relationship is threatened in some way. Thus, according to Livingston (1980), the passion component in a relationship is rather heavily dependent on uncertainty.

Sternberg's (1986) theory, suggests that passion is a very important factor with respect to romantic relationships. Applied to Sternberg's (1986) theory, Livingston's (1980) theory suggests that uncertainty is a very important factor with respect to romantic relationships. Considering the *Nice Guy Paradox*, it seems possible that nice guys may be more open and predictable, and might provoke less uncertainty in women, than less-nice guys. On the basis of Livingston (1980) and Sternberg's (1986) theories, this might help to explain why nice guys may often be overlooked by women. Thus, in combination, the theories of Sternberg (1986) and Livingston (1980) may contribute to an explanation of the *Nice Guy Paradox*.

2.2.6 Physical attractiveness and attraction

Numerous studies have demonstrated the importance of physical attractiveness in romantic relationships (Fitness, Fletcher & Overall, 2007; Urbaniak & Kilmann, 2003). Drawing again on Sternberg's (1986) theory, it could be argued that physical attractiveness would be likely to contribute most significantly towards the passion component of love. However, linking this

application of Sternberg's theory to the *Nice Guy Paradox* would be very speculative.

The above theories all relate to romantic relationships and attraction. However some of these theories can be applied to the *Nice Guy Paradox* more easily than others. The following section discusses the definition of the *Nice Guy Paradox*.

2.3 Defining the Nice Guy Paradox

Broadly, the *Nice Guy Paradox* refers to the perception that nice guys are not as successful in their romantically/sexually inclined interactions with women, as other men (Herold & Milhausen, 1999; Jensen-Campbell, Graziano & West, 1995; Urbaniak & Kilmann, 2003; Urbaniak & Kilmann, 2006). However, it is a subjective perception and means different things to different people. For instance, the research designs of the researchers that have studied the phenomenon reflect somewhat different interpretations of what the *Nice Guy Paradox* means, and why it has come into existence (Herold & Milhausen, 1999; Jensen-Campbell, Graziano & West, 1995; Urbaniak & Kilmann, 2003; Urbaniak and Kilmann, 2006) (this point is elaborated upon later in this chapter).

The following section discusses the general research on women's mate preferences in relation to the *Nice Guy Paradox*.

2.4 Women's mate preferences

Research about women's mate preferences does not really provide clear answers about whether nice guys do actually finish last, or about why this perception seems to be so deeply entrenched. However, in order to better understand the *Nice Guy Paradox*, it is necessary to carefully consider this research.

The following section deals with mate preference studies characterized by data-collection techniques that rely on information about preferred mate characteristics reported by the participants themselves.

2.4.1 Self-report studies

Many researchers interested in examining mate preferences have been influenced by the research conducted by Buss and Barnes (1986). In their study, 92 married couples were asked which factors they found most desirable in a mate. After factor analysis, the most significant factor was found to be kindness/considerateness, and this factor was found to be especially important for women. In addition, they conducted a second study which made use of undergraduate students as participants, and the factors of kindness and understanding were found to be most important for both sexes (Buss & Barnes, 1986). This research is very outdated. However, more recent studies that have made use of self-report, trait-based approaches have also found kindness/considerateness to be a very important factor determining people's, and especially women's, mate preferences (Beggan, 2001; Buss & Angleitner, 1989; Desrochers, 1995; Doosje, Rojahn & Fischer, 1999; Evans & Brase, 2007; Goodwin, 1990; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1995; Khallad, 2005; Lippa, 2007; Regan & Berscheid, 1997). On the basis of the above research, one would not expect nice guys to finish last, which makes the existence of the perception that nice guys finish last rather surprising. However, it should be noted that the above studies have taken a somewhat simplistic approach to studying mate preferences. For instance, they do not take relationship context into account and they simply assume that women's self-reported trait preferences accurately reflect their real-life mate choices.

A few less simplistic self-report studies have demonstrated that the importance of different characteristics in terms of mate selection tends to depend on the relationship context (Regan, 1998a, 1998b; Regan, Levin, Sprecher, Christopher & Cate, 2000; Sprecher & Regan, 2002). For instance, it has been demonstrated that the importance of extrinsic characteristics, such as physical attractiveness, is emphasized in the context of short-term, more

casual sexual relationships, while the importance of factors such as kindness and warmth is de-emphasized in the context of these relationships. In other words, it has been shown that the factors of kindness and warmth are less important when people are intending on establishing short-term relationships, than when they are looking for long-term relationships. However, even in the context of short-term sexual relationships, the above mentioned studies found that factors such as kindness and warmth were still very important to both men and women. This finding is echoed in the results of a study that asked participants to invest money in partner attributes. Participants were given a budget and were asked to allocate amounts of money to different mate characteristics, according to the importance which they placed upon these characteristics with respect to choosing a partner. This study concluded that kindness is an essential factor with respect to mate selection (Li, Bailey, Kenrick & Linsenmeier, 2002).

Once again, these findings do not seem compatible with the proposition that nice guys finish last. However, studies focusing on the actual experiences of men have produced somewhat different results. The following section will discuss a few of these studies.

2.4.2 Men's actual experiences

In a survey done by Trapnell and Meston (1996), it was found that men who were modest, agreeable and unselfish had less sexual variety and fewer sexual partners than men who were manipulative, arrogant, calculating and sly. Similarly, Bogaert and Fisher (1995) found that sensation seeking, testosterone, physical attractiveness, hypermasculine sex role and dominance were all positively correlated with men's lifetime number of sexual partners. On the other hand, intimacy and closeness were negatively correlated with men's life time number of sexual partners.

There is not much research that has utilized the above approach to studying women's mate preferences. However, the studies that have been conducted (above) seem to speak in favour of the proposition that nice guys finish last.

Thus, whilst women report that they want kind/considerate men, this research suggests that they do not actually tend to choose these men in real-life situations. However, to conclude that nice guys finish last in terms of women's mate preferences on the basis of this research would be to ignore certain fundamental considerations. For instance, such a conclusion would assume that all men, including the nice guys, are simply trying to have sex with as many women as possible throughout their lives, which may not be a valid assumption.

Nevertheless, unlike the self-report studies, the above research does seem to indicate that the *Nice Guy Paradox* may have some merit. In addition, it raises important questions about whether there might be a discrepancy between women's self-reported mate characteristic preferences, and their actual real-life mate choices. The following section will discuss studies on women's mate preferences that have utilized more behavioural approaches to this area of research.

2.4.3 Behavioural studies



In a study done by Sprecher (1989), participants were asked to rate how much they would be attracted to members of the opposite sex based on descriptions of these people, supposedly given by members of the same sex. These descriptions were structured around the three variables of physical attractiveness, expressiveness and earning potential. When asked which factors had contributed the most to their liking or disliking of the described members of the opposite sex, participants suggested that the variable of expressiveness was most important. However, physical attractiveness was actually found to be the most important factor determining men's and women's ratings.

In a similar, more recent study, descriptions of potential mates were varied along six dimensions, namely, physical attractiveness, financial resources, generosity, sexual experience/interest, current relationship status and desired level of relationship commitment (Wiederman & Dubois, 1998). Once again,

the factor of physical attractiveness was found to be most important for both men and women with respect to their mate choices. However, men correctly acknowledged this fact, while women incorrectly rated desired level of relationship commitment as being the most important variable, when it was actually one of the least important variables. In addition, a meta-analysis of the gender differences with respect to importance placed upon physical attractiveness by men and women across different research paradigms revealed that whilst men place more importance on physical attractiveness, the difference between men and women in this regard is greater in self-report studies than in behavioural studies (Feingold, 1990). This finding suggests that the factor of physical attractiveness has more influence on women's mate choices than women commonly report it to have. Other behavioural studies have found that when actually faced with mate choices, women tend to prefer males characterized by high levels of assertiveness and confidence, and high financial and social status (Botwin, Buss & Shackelford, 1997; Buss and Schmitt, 1993).

The above studies do not demonstrate that niceness is an unattractive trait in men, but do suggest that it may not be as important to women as they commonly report it to be. Having said this, the results of other behavioural studies suggest that women do tend to prefer men that espouse intrinsic values such as warmth and trustworthiness (Fletcher, Tither, O'Loughlin, Friesen & Overall, 2004; Sheldon, 2007). Nevertheless, based on the idea that women's self-reports may not be reflective of their actual behaviour, most (but not all) of the research that has focused directly on the phenomenon of the *Nice Guy Paradox* is behavioural in nature. This research is discussed below.

2.5 Studies on the Nice Guy Paradox

There is a scarcity of research that focuses directly on the *Nice Guy Paradox*. However, a few studies have been conducted and will be discussed in the sections that follow.

2.5.1 Dominance and prosocial orientation

Jensen-Campbell, Graziano and West (1995) did a study entitled, "Dominance, prosocial orientation and female preferences: Do nice guys really finish last?" (pp. 427). As the title suggests, this behavioural study focused on and varied the traits of dominance and prosocial orientation (which they equated with niceness), with the hypothesis that a man's prosocial orientation would increase his desirability as a date if he was also seen as being dominant. According to the results of this study, a man's prosocial orientation increases his desirability as a date irrespective of whether or not he is also seen as being dominant. However, the results also show that when a man was rated as being highly prosocial, he was found to be more physically and sexually attractive if he was also dominant. Independent of prosocial orientation, dominance was found to have no effect on desirability. Thus, rather than supporting the hypothesis, the results of this study seem to indicate that a man's level of dominance increases his desirability as a date if he is also seen as being prosocial (and that his prosocial orientation increases his level of desirability irrespective of his dominance). This suggests that prosocial orientation is more important than dominance as a characteristic that influences women's mate preferences.

Considering this study, it seems that prosocial orientation (niceness) is clearly demonstrated to be an important characteristic in terms of women's mate preferences. Thus, the results of this study certainly do not support the proposition that nice guys finish last. Having said this, it should be noted that this study has only focused on two variables, which makes it simplistic, and possibly inadequate. For instance, it did not include physical attractiveness as a variable, which many of the other behavioural studies have shown to be an important variable (Feingold, 1990; Sprecher, 1989; Urbaniak & Kilmann, 2003; Wiederman & Dubois, 1998). However, on the basis of this study, it would still be very surprising to find that (in real life) niceness actually hinders men in their pursuit of women. Therefore, whilst Jensen-Campbell, Graziano and West (1995) may demonstrate that prosocial orientation is an attractive characteristic to women, it does not really contribute to a better understanding

of the existence of the perception that nice guys finish last. In fact, it only seems to make the existence of this perception more mysterious.

The following section discusses a study with similar results and implications to the one discussed above.

2.5.2 Considering the individual characteristics of women

Herold and Milhausen (1999) conducted a behavioural study that asked women to choose between an inexperienced, nice, but somewhat shy man and an attractive, experienced, fun man. This study is entitled, "Dating preferences of university women: An analysis of the nice guy stereotype," (Herold & Milhausen, 1999, pp. 333). Results showed that 54% of women preferred the nice, shy man. However, these results were analyzed with respect to specific information given by the individual women, and they demonstrated that women's choices depend on the type of relationship that they seek, the importance that they place upon sex, their number of previous sexual partners and the extent to which they are prepared to accept a partner's previous relationship experience. Taking these factors into account, this study showed that in certain instances, nice guys may finish last. However, based on the results, more than half of the time, nice guys do not finish last, which contradicts the *Nice Guy Paradox*, and does not help to explain the existence of this perception.

Having said this, it should also be mentioned, that 56% of women said that they knew of other women that had chosen the not-so-nice guy over the nice guy, and 56% of women also agreed that nice guys are less likely to have as many sexual partners as guys that are less nice (Herold & Milhausen; 1999). It is difficult to say to what extent this additional information supports the *Nice Guy Paradox*, but it certainly hints at a discrepancy between the choices that women make in artificial behavioural studies and the choices that they make in real life. This discrepancy is well illustrated in following section, which discusses a behavioural study, as well as a study that focuses on the actual experiences of men in relation to the *Nice Guy Paradox*.

2.5.3 Physical attractiveness and the Nice Guy Paradox

Urbaniak and Kilmann (2003) performed some behavioural research that focused on niceness and physical attractiveness. Their study was entitled, "Physical attractiveness and the 'Nice Guy Paradox': Do nice guys really finish last?" (Urbaniak & Kilmann, 2003, pp. 413). In order to investigate this question, they created an experiment in which they asked women to choose between men in a dating show. In the first part of their research, niceness was the only variable. The results showed that women chose the nice men more often than the less-nice men. In the second part of their study, the researchers again included the variable of niceness, but also added the variable of physical attractiveness. Results showed that niceness was a more important factor in terms of desirability for more serious, long term relationships, and that physical attractiveness was a more important factor in terms of desirability for more casual, sexual relationships. Overall, this study demonstrated niceness to be an important factor in terms of women's mate preferences. Even in the context of less serious relationships, whilst niceness was not as important as physical attractiveness, it was not shown to be a negative or unattractive characteristic. Thus, in the context of this research, the *Nice Guy Paradox* does not seem to make much sense and it seems unlikely that nice guys would finish last. This once again raises questions about the reasons for the existence of this perception.

In a second study conducted by Urbaniak and Kilmann (2006), they again focused on niceness and physical attractiveness. However, in this study, they changed their approach and assessed female preferences based on men's real-life experiences with women (in a similar way to a few of the studies on men's actual experiences already discussed). However, their assessment of dating success was not simply based on the men's number of sexual conquests. Instead, they used a questionnaire that assessed success within four different relationship contexts using items that measured various types of success within each context. For instance, in addition to frequency of dating and number of partners, the questionnaire assessed factors such as length of relationship and subjective ratings of relationship satisfaction and success.

The researchers considered correlations between success in these relationship contexts, and measures of agreeableness (which they equated with niceness), as well as measures of physical attractiveness. Results demonstrated the importance of relationship context and showed that less agreeable men reported greater success in more superficial relationships. This advantage dissipated somewhat when it came to committed relationships. However, low agreeableness (not-so-niceness) was more strongly related to success across all relationship contexts than high agreeableness (niceness).

These findings are consistent with previous studies that focus on men's actual experiences, but seem to contradict the self-report studies and behavioural studies rather strongly. The above research supports the proposition that nice guys finish last, and makes the existence of this perception seem less surprising. Having said this, it should be mentioned, that while Urbaniak and Kilmann's (2006) assessment of relationship success is more comprehensive than similar previous studies, this assessment is still largely number based. In the opinion of the researcher, this means that it is still rather heavily reliant on the assumption that all men would like to maximize their number of relationships/sexual conquests, which may very well not be true (especially in the case of nice guys). Nevertheless, the validity of this research is supported by the existence of the *Nice Guy Paradox*, and the results suggest that behavioural studies may be too artificial in nature to capture the effect of this social phenomenon.

The following section discusses some of the implications and limitations of the research reviewed thus far.

2.6 Making sense of the available research

Considering the reviewed research, it is clear that the self-report studies strongly contradict the idea that nice guys finish last (Beggan, 2001; Buss & Angleitner, 1989; Buss & Barnes, 1986; Desrochers, 1995; Doosje, Rojahn & Fischer, 1999; Evans & Brase, 2007; Goodwin, 1990; Hatfield & Sprecher,

1995; Khallad, 2005; Lippa, 2007; Regan, 1998a, 1998b; Regan & Berscheid, 1997; Regan, Levin, Sprecher, Christopher & Cate, 2000; Sprecher & Regan, 2002). In addition, although the behavioural studies also emphasize other characteristics and suggest that niceness may not be quite as important as women report it to be, taken as a whole, these studies also speak rather strongly against the *Nice Guy Paradox* (Botwin, Buss & Shackelford, 1997; Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Feingold, 1990; Fletcher, Tither, O'Loughlin, Friesen & Overall, 2004; Herold & Milhausen, 1999; Jensen-Campbell, Graziano & West, 1995; Sheldon, 2007; Sprecher, 1989; Urbaniak & Kilmann, 2003; Wiederman & Dubois, 1998). On the other hand, studies that have focused on the actual real-life experiences of men have concluded that nice men are less successful when it comes to attracting women (Bogaert & Fisher, 1995; Trapnel & Meston, 1996; Urbaniak & Kilmann, 2006). Thus, these studies speak against the self-report studies and the behavioural studies, and lend support to the proposition that nice guys finish last.

Looking at a few of the limitations of these approaches, the self-report studies may be confounded by the social desirability bias, which refers to a tendency to give socially approved answers to questions about oneself in order to create a favourable impression (Weiten, 2001). In addition, in the opinion of the researcher, women may be largely unaware of the complex, potentially interdependent factors that influence their mate choices most strongly, which would severely undermine the validity of this approach to researching women's mate preferences. Similarly, the artificial situations utilized in behavioural studies may be too simplistic, and too far removed from real-life situations to produce results that actually reflect real-life mate choices (Urbaniak & Kilmann, 2003). Added to this, the researcher would argue that studies that focus on men's experiences are vulnerable to much criticism due to the fact that they are based on constructions of *success with women* that may not be shared by all men (or women). Thus, the above approaches all have limitations and none of them emerge as being obviously superior. Therefore, it seems that the research conducted thus far is unable to clearly establish whether or not nice guys finish last.

In addition to the general methodological limitations mentioned above, the studies that have focused directly on the *Nice Guy Paradox* all rely on assumptions made by the individual researchers about the characteristics associated with the nice guys that supposedly finish last. Their representations of these nice guys simply reflect their own perspectives. For instance, the nice guys described by Urbaniak and Kilmann (2003) were kind attentive, emotionally expressive and sensitive, while the nice guys described by Herold and Milhausen (1999) were nice, sexually inexperienced and somewhat shy. In addition, the research designs reflect researchers' personal theories on the *Nice Guy Paradox*. For instance, their decisions to include variables such as physical attractiveness and dominance seem to indicate that according to them, these traits are somehow relevant to the *Nice Guy Paradox*, and that they play a role in explaining the phenomenon (this point is elaborated upon in the following chapter). These assumptions, perspectives and theories are not necessarily wrong, but do not seem to be rooted in any prior research or theory.

All of the research discussed thus far is quantitative in nature. A thorough literature survey produced only one qualitative study that has focused on the *Nice Guy Paradox*. However, for all the research discussed thus far, it could be argued that the qualitative study provides the most insight into the existence of the perception that nice guys finish last. It is discussed in the section below.

2.7 A qualitative approach to understanding the Nice Guy Paradox

Herold and Milhausen (1999) included a qualitative part to their study to obtain a more in-depth understanding about why nice guys are seen as being more or less successful with women than other men.

The participants (who were female) were asked whether they thought that women were less likely to have sex with nice guys than not-so-nice guys. They were also asked to explain their answers. Content analysis was performed in order to gain insight into women's perceptions regarding this

question. Results showed that women often perceive the *nice guys* referred to by the *Nice Guy Paradox* as being polite, moral, committed, caring and respectful. However, as the participants explained, these *nice guys* are also often less physically attractive and less adventurous/exciting than other men. In addition, according to the women interviewed, they tend to be less confident than other men, which is reflected in their approach to women and can lead to them being perceived as being weak and needy. Thus, while these *nice guys* often have many good attributes, according to this research, they tend to be perceived as less physically attractive, exciting, confident, strong and independent than other men. This might explain why many of the women interviewed reported that they desire these *nice guys* as friends, but prefer other men as lovers.

The above research demonstrates the complexity of the *Nice Guy Paradox*. Besides niceness, the *nice guys* that finish last are also heavily associated with a host of other more negative attributes. Thus, it may be that niceness in itself is not unattractive to women, but that it is often associated with unattractive attributes in men. One could even speculate about the reasons for this potential association. However, the point is that the above research provides a great deal of insight and provokes the type of thought that could lead to an abundance of interesting theory, as well as interaction with established theory. This theory could be used as the basis for further qualitative and quantitative investigation.

It seems clear that in order to better understand the *Nice Guy Paradox*, more insight-orientated qualitative research is needed. Hopefully, the present research will result in a better understanding of the perception that nice guys finish last, and will eventually lead to quantitative research with stronger theoretical foundations.

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter began by introducing the *Nice Guy Paradox*. Following this, it discussed some theoretical literature on romantic attraction in relation to the

Nice Guy Paradox, before reflecting on its definition. Some general literature on women's mate preferences was then reviewed. The chapter went on to explore the available research that is focused directly on the *Nice Guy Paradox*. This chapter demonstrates the lack of qualitative research in this area of inquiry. In addition, it has attempted to illustrate the value of qualitative research in terms of better understanding the perception that nice guys finish last. The researcher has opted to use a qualitative research method in attempting to gain further insight into the *Nice Guy Paradox* through the current study. This research method is discussed in the following chapter.



CHAPTER 3

PHENOMENOLOGY AS A RESEARCH METHOD

This chapter focuses on the research method that has been chosen for this study. It starts with a brief discussion of methodology, and then goes on to elucidate upon the two broad methodological approaches to research. After a discussion of the quantitative and qualitative approaches to research, the shift from quantitative to qualitative approaches is explicated. Phenomenology is then introduced, and a discussion of its development follows. This chapter elaborates on the phenomenological concepts deemed to be most relevant to this study before discussing the intended phenomenological research procedure on a more practical level. Finally a brief justification of the choice of phenomenology as a research method is provided.

3.1 Methodology in the human and social sciences

Research is conducted with the goal of gathering knowledge about a specific topic. However, the term research refers to attempts to know things in a way that goes beyond mere description, anecdote and common sense. By conducting research, the researcher attempts to make a contribution to his or her field of inquiry, and consequently, to knowledge about the world. Thus, research can be thought of as a process that has to be planned and thought through, and that seeks to be capable of withstanding challenges from those that question its methods and resultant findings (Pole & Lampard, 2002). Therefore, methodology is central to the concept of research. The term *methodology* refers to the examination of the procedures, or the detailed and logically ordered plans, that are utilized in the pursuit of knowledge. In the human and social sciences, the pursuit of knowledge is focused on efforts to understand human and social phenomena (Polkinghorne, 1983).

Within the human and social sciences, there are two broad methodological approaches to research. These are the quantitative and qualitative approaches.

3.1.1 Quantitative approaches

Quantitative approaches are also sometimes known as traditional, positivist or experimental approaches (Creswell, 1994). These studies are generally carried out in controlled settings, and aim to test specific hypotheses. Numerical data representing operationalized constructs is collected. Statistics, tables and charts are used in order to analyze this data. Hypotheses are discussed in light of these analyses (Neuman, 2003).

Quantitative thinking stems from empiricist tradition, and contains various assumptions. The approaches to research informed by this thinking view reality as being singular and separate from the researcher. Thus, reality is viewed as something that can be measured objectively (Punch, 2005). Therefore, the quantitative researcher is encouraged to be completely independent of that which is being researched. Quantitative approaches attempt to be value-free and unbiased. The *facts* are reported and statements about values are omitted. The rhetoric used in these approaches is formal, and is based on set definitions and accepted quantitative words. In addition, an impersonal voice is utilized, and the researcher is referred to in the third person, if at all (Creswell, 1994).

Methodologically, these approaches make use of a deductive form of logic in order to test hypothesized cause and effect relationships. The research designs are static, and categories, concepts, variables and hypotheses are chosen and isolated before the study (Punch, 2005). These approaches attempt to exert maximum control over extraneous factors in order to free themselves from context. Quantitative methods intend to yield generalizations that are able to explain and predict human behaviour. The accuracy and reliability of these methods are judged according to specific standards of validity and reliability (Creswell, 1994).

As should become clear in the following section, quantitative approaches differ from qualitative approaches on various levels.

3.1.2 Qualitative approaches

Qualitative approaches are also sometimes termed constructivist, naturalistic, interpretivist, postpositivist or postmodern approaches (Creswell, 1994). These studies are generally carried out in natural settings, where the aim is to become immersed in the data in order to discover meanings. This data takes various shapes, sizes and forms. During analyses, the researcher attempts to extract themes, and to organize the information into a coherent, consistent picture (Neuman, 2003).

Qualitative approaches are compatible with postmodern thinking, and hold various assumptions. For these approaches the only reality is the reality that is constructed by the individuals involved in the research. Thus, reality is seen as being subjective and multiple (Punch, 2005). The researcher's role in the construction of knowledge is acknowledged, as he or she is seen as having an inevitable interaction with that being researched. In fact, the researcher tries to minimize the distance between himself or herself, and those being studied. Therefore, qualitative approaches acknowledge that they are value laden and biased, and actively report on these values and biases. Although accepted qualitative words are used, the rhetoric of these approaches is informal and a personal voice can be utilized (Creswell, 1994).

Methodologically, these approaches could be described as inductive processes, during which mutual simultaneous shaping of factors takes place. The designs of qualitative approaches are emerging and categories are identified during the research process (Punch, 2005). This provides rich context-bound information, from which patterns and theories are developed in order to gain interpretive understanding. These approaches claim accuracy and reliability through verification, which is achieved using various techniques such as triangulation (Creswell, 1994).

Although very different, both quantitative and qualitative approaches are widely used in modern research. However, as will now be discussed, this was not always the case.

3.2 The shift from quantitative to qualitative approaches

The process during which qualitative approaches gradually acquired a similar level of status and recognition to quantitative approaches, should be viewed in light of the broader shift from modernism to postmodernism (Punch, 2005).

The modernist conception of science has its roots in a definition which holds that only those things which are absolutely certain can be counted as knowledge (Bernard, 2000). This conception was dominant when scientific procedures were first directed towards the human realm in the nineteenth century. As a result, methods were judged to be of scientific value, depending on whether they were able to produce certain or *objective* truth. Consequently, the range of methods deemed acceptable at the time, were reduced to those that incorporated the principles of deductive logic and intersubjectively verifiable data (Polkinghorne, 1983). In other words, during the early development of the human sciences, widely entrenched modernism resulted in a strong emphasis on the importance and superiority of quantitative approaches to research.

It must be noted, however, that during this time, many of the researchers within the human realm believed that quantitative methods were unable to access too much of what is central to human experience (Polkinghorne, 1983). For instance, Wilhelm Dilthey asserted that human beings live in a web of meanings that they spin themselves, and that in order to study human beings, we need to understand those meanings (Bernard, 2000). Thus, tensions between the requirements of producing *objective* truths and the requirements of addressing the most significant questions about the human realm have accompanied human science since its origins (Polkinghorne, 1983). Due to the existence of these tensions, the human sciences were fertile grounds for the rise of qualitative approaches. However, a broad and

fundamental philosophical shift was required in order to justify their scientific value and consequent development. This shift only occurred when a school of thought known as postmodernism made its impact in the late twentieth century (Bernard, 2000).

The postmodern conception of science challenges the idea that human beings have access to *objective* truth. For example, Ferdinand Schiller argued that since the method and contents of modernistic science are the products of human thought, reality and truth cannot be *out there*, to be found, but must be made up by human beings (Bernard, 2000). Thus, postmodernism posits that knowledge should be seen as the best understanding that we have been able to produce thus far, as opposed to an ultimate reality. Science is viewed as a creative search to understand better, and correct, objective methods for scientific research are not prescribed. Instead, methods are chosen based on the extent to which they are able to address particular questions. Similarly, methods are judged as being acceptable when they are able to produce results that convince the community that the new understanding is deeper, fuller and more useful than the previous one (Polkinghorne, 1983).

The rise of postmodern thought redefined, or at least blurred scientific boundaries, and created space for qualitative approaches to enter the scientific domain. These approaches have flourished, and are now widely recognized as being significant and complementary to quantitative approaches (Bernard, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1983). When trying to understand the human realm, the usefulness of qualitative approaches becomes very apparent.

3.3 Understanding the human realm

Human beings present the most complex kinds of problems. They have histories, they deliberate and make rational plans, they are driven by physical needs and desires, and are pulled by socially instilled values. Humans are caught within a web of internal and external structures, yet at times they seem to transcend these structures and produce novel and creative ideas. As a

result, the problems of understanding that focus on humans, and their communities, present the greatest challenge to research methods and tools of comprehension (Polkinghorne, 1983). Whilst quantitative methods are able to investigate aspects of the human realm, they make use of a framework that severely limits their usefulness in a variety of areas. Qualitative approaches are not restricted by this framework, with its corresponding assumptions and implications. As a result they provide useful ways of conducting research in a variety of areas that are not accessible using quantitative approaches (Punch, 2005). Phenomenology is a qualitative method of enquiry, and is a unique tool of comprehension with which to access the human realm. This tool focuses directly on what is arguably the central aspect of human experience-experience itself (Valle & Halling, 1989). The following sections will elaborate on phenomenology.

3.4 Defining phenomenology

To define phenomenology is an almost impossible task. While this chapter will expand on the history and concepts of phenomenology to some extent, it should be noted, that even the most famous phenomenological philosophers' respective conceptions of phenomenology, are appreciably different (Schmitt, 1967). However, as a means of attempting to convey a preliminary understanding of phenomenology, the following ideas may be useful.

Phenomenology is the study of essences, or central underlying meanings (Creswell, 1998; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). It makes use of specific methods in order to gain essential understanding of human consciousness and experience (Valle & Halling, 1989). Within phenomenology, the term phenomenon refers to the presence of anything given to consciousness, precisely as it is given or experienced (Giorgi, 1997). Phenomenology is concerned with the study of these phenomena. Having said this, to gain a deeper understanding of phenomenology, it is essential to consider its development.

3.5 The development of phenomenology

Phenomenology is an established qualitative research method of the social and human sciences, and will be utilized in this study. However, it is more than just an approach to research, and has its roots in the philosophical perspectives of Edmund Husserl and the discussions that followed (Spiegelberg, 1965). This section will briefly deal with the development of phenomenology.

3.5.1 A new method of inquiry

Husserl was a German philosopher, and was originally a mathematician and physicist. Disturbed by the confusion of language and opinion within philosophy, he ambitiously set out to convert it into a *rigorous science*. However, it is crucial to note, that he did not envisage a philosophy with the same reductionistic scientific character as belongs to positivistic science. Instead, he argued that philosophy needed to become scientific in its own way (Luijpen & Koren, 1969).

Throughout his life, Husserl's goal was to find a new foundation for pure logic and epistemology. He attempted to achieve this goal through the development of phenomenological analysis, which focuses on ideal essences, or on objects in so far as they are intended by and in consciousness. This method of analysis describes the objects of consciousness as they give themselves, as pure and simple intentions of consciousness, in order to render them visible (Thevenaz, 1962). Husserl believed that the intended objects of consciousness, or phenomena, should be allowed to speak for themselves, and although it is not a natural science, his phenomenology also strives for inter-subjectivity and general laws (Kruger, 1988).

The mergence of phenomenology and existentialism is discussed below.

3.5.2 Existential phenomenology

Kierkegaard was a Danish thinker who preceded Husserl and the development of phenomenology. He is generally regarded as the founder of existential philosophy and he believed that it was imperative for philosophy to address itself to the existence of the individual person and the fundamental themes with which human beings invariably struggle. His orientation was less academic than that of Husserl and he could not be described as a phenomenologist (Valle & Halling, 1989). However, in certain critical ways, his thinking was compatible with the philosophy of Husserl, in that they both rejected the reductionistic tendencies of natural science and denied that man could be fully understood by regarding him as a system of atoms. Heidegger, a student of Husserl's, realized this parallel, and was one of the first thinkers to bring together existential concerns and phenomenological methodology (Kruger, 1988). In coming together, existentialism gave up its anti-scientific attitude, and phenomenology was enriched by existential themes (Luijpen & Koren, 1969).

Existential phenomenology can be viewed as a philosophical discipline that seeks to understand human existence in a way that is free of the presuppositions of our cultural heritage (Valle & Halling, 1989). Fundamentally, Husserl used phenomenology to ask epistemological questions such as: *what is there?* and *what reality can be known for certain?* He sought to unfold knowledge about the world from the starting point of intentional consciousness. Heidegger sought an even more radical foundation than Husserl. He used phenomenology to address the question: *what is the meaning of being?* He sought to uncover the meaning of being from the starting point of man. In other words, whilst Husserl used phenomenology to search for the essence of what can be known, Heidegger used it as a way of searching for the essence of what it means to be in the world. Thus, Heidegger adopted Husserl's phenomenological methodology, but applied it to existential rather than epistemological concerns (Thevenaz, 1962).

The broad philosophical inclinations of Husserlian phenomenology, as well as existential phenomenology, have now been outlined. The following section discusses the specific philosophical positions of four of the most influential early phenomenologists, relative to one another.

3.5.3 The impact of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty on the development of phenomenology

Husserl searched for the essence of consciousness (and knowledge), but did this on the basis of the experiencing Ego and its correlative life-world, which refers to a person's most rudimentary experience of the world (Thevenaz, 1962). Heidegger essentially took a different direction. He did not subscribe to the idea of a transcendental Ego and searched for something more fundamental than the essence of consciousness. He introduced the concept of being-in-the-world, which has no place for a distinct Ego. Heidegger argued for a total indissoluble meeting point between the individual and his or her world. From this point, he pursued the essential meaning of *Dasein* (human existence) (Kruger, 1988). The concepts of the life-world and being-in-the-world will be expanded upon further later in this chapter.

Sartre also took issue with Husserl's idea of a transcendental Ego (Schmitt, 1967). His view was that in order to disclose a pure consciousness, a radical reduction that includes not only the world, but the Ego itself, is necessary. According to Sartre, we should not say more than *there is consciousness*, which leaves us with nothingness. Whilst Sartre saw the transcendental Ego as being unnecessary and even harmful, unlike Heidegger, his intention was faithful to that of Husserl's, as his ultimate goal was a purer notion of phenomenological consciousness (Thevenaz, 1962).

Merleau-Ponty also advocated a radical reduction, but thought of it in a very different way to Sartre. In fact, Merleau-Ponty's radical reduction was the exact opposite of Sartre's reduction to nothingness (Spiegelberg, 1965). Instead of a reduction leading to a perfectly translucent consciousness, which effectively tears away from the world, Merleau-Ponty saw radical reduction as

a means of becoming conscious of our indestructible relationship with the world. He did not understand a withdrawal from the world if it was not with the goal of seeing the world and becoming aware of our relationship to it. Merleau-Ponty viewed man as being inextricably mixed up with his existential relationship to the world, and he emphasized radical reflexion, whereby the foundation of reflexion is itself reflected upon. In this way, reflexions on phenomena become phenomena themselves, and phenomenology is a repetition that is never complete (Thevenaz, 1962).

The tentative definition and brief discussion regarding the development of phenomenology should have conveyed some idea of what this approach to research is about. However, it is still necessary to clarify phenomenology and its application to this study.

3.6 Phenomenological concepts

There is a general consensus about how psychological phenomenology should be conducted as a research tool, and the methods involved are based on phenomenological principles. However, these methods are meant to function as guidelines or outlines, and in line with postmodern tradition, researchers are expected to develop plans of study that are especially suited to understanding the particular experiential phenomena that they wish to study (Creswell, 1998). Thus, what follows is an elaboration on those phenomenological concepts that are most relevant to this research.

3.6.1 Life-world (*Lebenswelt*)

Husserl's *Lebenswelt* is the world that he attempted to access by using phenomenological analysis. This life-world is a person's world, as given in direct and immediate experience (Valle & Halling, 1989).

This world constitutes a naïve type of experience, which is not based on or constructed from anything else, and is prior to all reflective interpretation, scientific or otherwise. Hypotheses, theories and causal thinking are not a part

of this world. They are higher order, less basic, derived notions, that are, like all ideas, derivatives of the life-world (Valle & Halling, 1989). Thus, the life-world is independent of knowledge, but can be thought of as a starting point for knowledge. A person's life-world reflects his/her most rudimentary experience. By accessing and describing this experience, phenomenology aims discover its essence (Giorgi, 1997).

3.6.2 *Being-in-the-world*

Heidegger's concept of being-in-the-world informed his particular philosophical inquiry. It should not be understood as a mere substitute for a term like subject or ego. It does not mean that human beings simply find themselves in the world, just like other objects. A conceptual shift or leap is called for (Kruger, 1988).

This conceptual shift entails that the world should not be seen as some sort of container, which apart from other things, also contains man (Kruger, 1988). Thus, people should not simply be viewed as objects in nature. Being-in-the-world refers to a total, indissoluble unity or interrelationship of the individual with his or her world (Valle & Halling, 1989). It is essential to the conceptualization of being human, that things-that-are (plants, rivers, mountains, fellow human beings *et cetera*) are always showing themselves to human beings in some form or manner. To illustrate this essentialness, one just needs to try and think of man in such a way that nothing, but nothing, shows itself to him, not even in the way of a vague feeling of something. Attempting such an exercise illustrates how man, or rather Dasein (human existence), cannot be defined without referring to the world, and the world cannot be defined without referring to Dasein (Kruger, 1988).

Therefore, when thinking about people and their world, we realize that if either is discarded, talk of the other is meaningless. They co-constitute each other, are always acting on each other, and can be said to have a dialogal relationship (Valle & Halling, 1989). One of the implications of this concept, is that phenomena can only be fully understood, and meaning can only be

discovered, by concentrating exclusively on the point of contact where being and consciousness meet, as opposed to concentrating exclusively on objects or subjects (Thevenaz, 1962).

The concept of being in the world has three broad categories. These categories or modes are known as *Umwelt*, *Mitwelt* and *Eigenwelt*. *Umwelt* refers to the individual's perception of his or her relationship with the physical and biological world. *Mitwelt* refers to the individual's perception of and orientation towards his or her interaction with the social world (people). *Eigenwelt* refers to the individual's relationship with him or herself. This concept denotes people's inner dialogues, and essentially, their self-consciousness (Maddi, 2001).

3.6.3 Human bodiliness

The body shapes itself according to its task in the world. For instance, the aggressive stride of a dominant personality contrasts with the uncertain shuffle of a submissive personality. Thus, the nature of one's bodiliness shows itself in the glance, the handshake, the gait, the gesture and the posture *et cetera*. However, man is generally unaware of his own body until it becomes an object for him. An example of this can be found during times of sickness. Suddenly, the body which has been taken for granted, and which was lived in so unwarily and so matter-of-factly, becomes a barrier to the fulfillment of man's needs. Consequently, man becomes conscious of having a body as an object, and being limited in certain ways by this object (Kruger, 1988).

Another way in which a man's body can be objectified to some extent for himself, is through his internalization of a social schema which requires him to have a body for others. In this dimension of being a body for others, man becomes aware of the extent to which his own body fulfills social requirements, and in this sense, becomes more aware of his own body as an object. In Western society, one reacts by deodorizing oneself and becomes anxious if one dresses in clothes not approved of by the peer group, or if

one's body build deviates from the ideal norm. In addition, one is terrified of being too fat or too thin, not pretty enough or if one is male, not fitting in with the cultural ideal of masculinity which is the norm in Western countries (Kruger, 1988).

3.6.4 Intentionality of consciousness

No discussion of phenomenology would be complete without mentioning intentionality. For Husserl, intentionality is the essential feature of consciousness, and it refers to the fact that consciousness is always directed to an object that is not itself consciousness, although it could be, as in reflective acts (Giorgi, 1997). Thus, the idea is that consciousness should not be seen to exist in and for itself, as it always intends an object. For example, I do not just love, I love someone, I do not just see, I see something (Kruger, 1988). In fact the idea of consciousness seems completely meaningless if it is not connected with an object that is intended by consciousness.

Based on the concept of intentionality, it is easy to see how phenomenology acquired its name. For if consciousness always intends an object, then to focus on consciousness should be to focus on the conscious experience of an object. Husserl's idea was that a phenomenon, or intended object of consciousness (precisely as it is given or experienced), should be the focus of epistemological inquiry. In other words, if we are looking at a tree, we should try and look at this tree without any preconceptions and we should then explicate our primary experience of the tree (Kruger, 1988).

3.6.5 Phenomenological reduction

Using the example from the above paragraph, reduction might be described as the process that the phenomenologist would make use of when attempting to view a tree without any preconceptions. Reduction brackets past knowledge about the phenomenon encountered, in order to be fully present to it, as it is in the concrete situation in which one is encountering it (Giorgi, 1997).

Man tends to think that the world and the objects around him exist independently of him, and that what he experiences is a direct reflection of what is *out there*. He somehow forgets that the world that he perceives is simply his experience. Husserl referred to this naïve belief in the independent existence of what is given in experience as the *natural attitude* (Valle & Halling, 1989). This natural attitude includes the ensemble of all the empirical, rational and even scientific judgments that man makes about the world (Thevenaz, 1962). These judgments influence the way in which man categorizes, organizes and interprets his perceptions (Valle & Halling, 1989).

The phenomenologist assumes a different position or vantage point, which Husserl refers to as the *transcendental attitude*. In assuming this attitude, one attempts to suspend one's preconceptions and presuppositions, and in phenomenology, this process is known as *bracketing* (Valle & Halling, 1989). This does not mean that one empties oneself of all possible past knowledge. One only *puts aside or renders non-influential*, all past knowledge that may be associated with the presently given object, so that it has a chance to present itself in its fullness (Giorgi, 1997). In order to bracket knowledge, one must first make it explicit. Thus, one must lay out the related assumptions so that they appear in as clear a form as possible. As one brackets assumptions, it seems that new assumptions emerge at the level of reflective awareness. The process of bracketing and rebracketing is known as reduction, as one quite literally reduces the world as it is considered in the natural attitude, to a world of pure phenomena (Valle & Halling, 1989).

The above discussion of reduction has referred to its use as part of the philosophical method of phenomenological analysis. The following will explicate on how it is adapted for scientific analysis. The major change introduced to the method in order to conform more readily to scientific analysis, is that descriptions are obtained from others from the perspective of the natural attitude. This is a practical necessity, due to the fact one cannot expect all the persons in the whole world to be phenomenological, and thus capable of assuming the attitude of reduction. In any event, this modification makes sense when one considers that the purpose of phenomenological

reduction is precisely to understand the natural attitude better. What is critical, is that the researcher maintains an attitude of reduction, and that he or she describes the participant's experience as it is given, free of his or her own preconceptions, with as much precision and detail as possible (Giorgi, 1997).

Thus, this study will take an attitude of reduction (and is phenomenological), in the sense that the researcher will bracket his own knowledge in order to accurately describe and analyze the participants' experiences of the *Nice Guy Paradox*. The above concepts should have made the phenomenological inclination of this study quite clear. The following section will outline the practical procedure followed when using this approach to research.

3.7 The procedure of phenomenological research

The aim of phenomenological psychological research is to understand psychological phenomena from the perspectives of the persons involved. Thus, the phenomenologist tries to understand how a participant experiences and attaches meaning to a particular phenomenon (Huysamen, 1994). The procedure used in order to achieve this end can be broken into three steps. The first step is the phenomenological reduction, which has been described extensively already. The second step is the description of the phenomena, which entails an interview that gets transcribed. This step uses the medium of language to communicate the objects of the describer's consciousness, precisely as they are presented. The third step is the search for essences, which entails an analysis of the phenomenological descriptions gained during step two (Giorgi, 1997). These steps are elaborated upon in detail in the next chapter.

This study has applied the above procedure to the *Nice Guy Paradox*, with the goal of attaining the essential structure/s of this phenomenon as experienced by women, in order to gain a richer understanding of the perception that nice guys finish last when it comes to attracting women. The following section will provide a justification for the use of the phenomenological method in this study.

3.8 Justification for choosing the phenomenological research method

It has already been made clear in the literature review, that almost all the studies that have addressed the subject of the *Nice Guy Paradox* have been quantitative. In fact, the only qualitative study performed in this area of research was performed as part of a larger quantitative inquiry (Herold & Milhausen, 1999). In addition, no phenomenological studies on this topic have been found. Thus, there is a clear lack of qualitative and phenomenological research addressing the perception that nice guys finish last when it comes to attracting women.

The need for a qualitative phenomenological study in this area is emphasized by the complex nature of the *Nice Guy Paradox*. This commonly held perception is a social phenomenon, that academically speaking, seems to be very poorly understood. This reality might be a result of the fact that quantitative research on the topic has preceded qualitative research. Much of the quantitative research performed thus far holds various presuppositions and assumptions. For example, a study that seeks to determine whether women prefer niceness or physical attractiveness in men, such as the one performed by Urbaniak and Kilmann (2003), presupposes a particular understanding of the phenomenon. It seems that the researchers may have believed that physical attractiveness could be more attractive to women than niceness. However, if this possibility was put forward as a potential way of explaining the *Nice Guy Paradox*, it would also betray the researchers' assumption that nice guys tend to be less physically attractive than less nice guys (why else would physical attractiveness being more important than niceness lead to nice guys finishing last?). In addition, to operationalize the construct of the nice guy, the researchers would have been forced to make decisions about what constitutes a nice guy, which of course, would have drawn heavily on their own subjective opinions.

The intention of the above example is not to discredit quantitative research. Rather, the example is intended to highlight the importance of less presumptuous, and more understanding orientated research as a starting

point for the investigation of a complex social phenomenon. This study aims to contribute to a deeper, richer insight and understanding into women's experience of the *Nice Guy Paradox*, which explains why its phenomenological inclination is appropriate. Such understanding may help quantitative researchers to design future studies based on more informed assumptions, rather than assumptions that are simply based on their particular understanding of the phenomenon.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed phenomenology as the research method of choice for this study. From the starting point of introducing methodology in the human and social sciences, the focus was narrowed to include discussions of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Phenomenology was introduced as a qualitative approach, and was tentatively defined. A brief outline of its early development as a philosophical method of inquiry was also included. What followed was an elaboration on relevant phenomenological concepts and practical phenomenological procedures. Lastly a justification for the choice of phenomenology as a method of conducting research was provided. The purpose of this chapter was to contextualize the chosen research method, and to explain its application to this study.

The next chapter will explicate the specific methodology and procedure adhered to in the current study.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE

This chapter focuses on the general procedure followed during this research. It starts by discussing the aims of a phenomenological study, the general aim of this particular study, and the specific objectives that were formulated in order to achieve this aim. It then goes on to discuss the way in which these specific objectives were achieved, with detailed reference to the participants, the interviews and the method of data analysis. Finally, this chapter discusses the validity of the phenomenological approach to research employed by this study.

4.1 Aims of the study

As explained in the previous chapter, the aim of phenomenological psychological research is to understand psychological phenomena from the perspectives of the persons involved. Thus, the phenomenologist tries to understand how a participant experiences and attaches meaning to a particular phenomenon, whilst bracketing his or her own knowledge and preconceived ideas about the phenomenon (Giorgi, 1997; Huysamen, 1994). The following sections will expand on the general and the specific aims of this study.

4.1.1 General aim

This research will focus on the phenomenon commonly known as the *Nice Guy Paradox*. The general aim of the research will be to discover the participants' particular experiences and understandings of this phenomenon. Thus, this study will try to gain insight into the ways in which the participants understand and make meaning of the *Nice Guy Paradox* based on their experiences in relation to the perception that nice guys finish last when it comes to attracting women. In this way, the current study seeks to discover

the essential structure of this psychological phenomenon. To achieve the general aim of this study, the researcher was required to formulate and pursue more specific aims.

4.1.2 Specific aims

In order to better understand the *Nice Guy Paradox* using a phenomenological research method, the current study tailored a procedure with the goal of attaining the following specific objectives:

- To source participants with experience of the *Nice Guy Paradox*.
- To complete a biographical questionnaire with each participant.
- To conduct and transcribe a phenomenological interview with each participant.
- To analyze the transcribed interviews using a phenomenological approach.
- To synthesize a fresh understanding of this psychological phenomenon.
- To draw conclusions about the essential structure of the *Nice Guy Paradox*.
- To make recommendations for future research in this area.

The procedure designed to achieve the above aims is discussed below.

4.2 Procedure

The procedure outlined below is divided into sections which discuss the participants, the interviews and the method of data analysis. The research participants are discussed first.

4.2.1 Participants

All research, including qualitative research, involves sampling. A social study can never utilize everyone, everywhere in the world, and as a result, researchers are always required to make decisions about which participants to choose. More specifically, every study needs to address the following two questions: *How big will the sample be and why?* and *How will it be chosen and why?* These questions tie the sampling plan to the paradigm, purpose and overall logic of the study (Punch, 2005).

Sampling methods recommended for quantitative research are more specific than those recommended for qualitative research. However, this does not mean that sampling is less important in qualitative research. Whilst quantitative studies tend to use probability sampling methods with the goal of acquiring a sample that is representative of some larger population, qualitative studies do not generally concern themselves with representation, and tend to purposefully select participants that will best answer the research question (Creswell, 1994). Thus, when a study makes use of this purposive sampling method, the researcher is required to identify selection criteria to ensure that the participants are appropriate for the study (Beins, 2004). The following sections discuss these criteria.

4.2.1.1 Phenomenological requirements

Phenomenological research focuses on peoples' experience. Thus, in order to conduct this research, it is necessary to select participants that have experienced the phenomenon being studied (Polkinghorne, 1983). Consequently, the main requirement for selection as a participant in the

current study was experience of the *Nice Guy Paradox*. The researcher purposefully selected participants that knew about the *Nice Guy Paradox*. However, a theoretical knowledge of this paradox and its meaning was not enough. The participants were also required to have had some experience of the paradox. Thus, they had to be able to discuss it with respect to their own lives and/or the lives of the people around them. Obviously, it was also necessary for participants to be comfortable discussing their experience of the paradox, and to be interested enough to engage thoughtfully in a detailed description of this experience.

The phenomenological method pursues the essential structure of a psychological phenomenon. Thus, it is necessary for participants in a study that uses this method, to be capable of conveying their experience with richness and depth, as opposed to superficiality (Kruger, 1988). Consequently, it was required that participants had relatively clear memory with respect to their experience of the paradox. In addition, participants were only chosen if they possessed the communication skills and vocabulary necessary to express their experience in an articulate manner.

Besides the above phenomenological considerations, it was also necessary to make more general decisions about participant characteristics. These are discussed below.

4.2.1.2 Other selection criteria

The perception of the *Nice Guy Paradox* is commonly held among men. However, it refers to women's mate preferences, and because of this, the current study opted to use women as participants. Essentially, the researcher wanted to give selected heterosexual women a chance to speak for themselves about the *Nice Guy Paradox* in order to elicit the meaning that they attach to this phenomenon.

4.2.1.3 Sourcing the participants

This study made use of university students as participants. This was done in order to maximize the chance of obtaining intelligent and articulate participants. In addition, students are normally at a stage of development in which attraction, the formation of romantic relationships, and the achievement of intimacy, are very relevant issues (Erikson, 1968). For this reason, they were thought to be particularly likely to be interested in the perception of the *Nice Guy Paradox*.

Practically, the researcher made use of the snow-ball sampling method (Kelly, 1999). He asked people that he knew to help him identify volunteers that might make suitable participants. Short, preliminary discussions were initiated with these women. These exploratory discussions gave the researcher an opportunity to evaluate these volunteers against the criteria already mentioned. In addition, these women were asked to help the researcher identify other potential participants. On the basis of this process, three volunteers were requested to engage in longer, more in-depth interviews. Before actually commencing these interviews, participants were asked to fill out biographical questionnaires and were required to sign forms to indicate their informed consent. Information gained in the biographical interviews is discussed in the sections that introduce the individual participants in the chapters that follow. The interviews were conducted at the respective residences of the participants. The following sections discuss these interviews in more detail.

4.2.2 Interviews

This study used face-to-face, one on one in-person interviews in order to collect the data (Creswell, 1994). This method of data collection is one of the most powerful ways that we have of understanding others (Punch, 2005). The specific nature of the phenomenological interviews conducted for the purposes of this study is discussed below.

4.2.2.1 The open-ended interview

The phenomenological interview is a type of open-ended interview. In general these interviews attempt to understand complex behaviour without imposing any *a priori* categorization which might limit the field of inquiry (Punch, 2005). Thus, when conducting phenomenological research, structure is minimal and the researcher does not follow a predetermined set of questions. However, this is not to say that there is no structure. The purpose of the phenomenological interview is to acquire an open description of the participant's experience of the phenomenon under scrutiny. Thus, the interviewer is required to introduce the phenomenon, and to ask the participant to describe her experience of the phenomenon. In addition, the interviewer needs to guide the interview in order to make sure that the participant does not stray from the research topic. The interviewer should also ask for clarification when he or she does not understand an aspect of the participant's experience of the phenomenon (Kvale, 1996).

Beyond the above considerations, the phenomenological interview should be lead by the participant (Kvale, 1996). Thus, in the current study, the researcher introduced the idea of the *Nice Guy Paradox*. He then asked the participants to fill out the biographical questionnaires and to give their informed consent. Following this, he prompted the participants by asking them to describe honestly, and in as much detail as possible, their experience of the *Nice Guy Paradox*. Thereafter, the researcher only intervened in order to refocus the interview onto the topic, or to seek clarification with regards to the meaning that the participants' attached to their experience.

The phenomenological interviewer's primary role is to facilitate open description whilst ensuring that his or her preconceived ideas are not having an influence on the interview process (Creswell, 1998). This is achieved through bracketing which was discussed thoroughly in the section on phenomenological reduction in chapter three. The following section will discuss how bracketing has been applied in the current study.

4.2.2.2 Bracketing

To recapitulate briefly, within the context of psychological research, bracketing refers to an active effort on the part of the researcher, to *shelve* all past knowledge about the phenomenon being studied. In other words, the researcher *puts aside* or *renders non-influential* all preconceptions and presuppositions relating to experience that the participants are asked to describe (Giorgi, 1997).

One of the reasons that the researcher decided to study the *Nice Guy Paradox*, was due to his personal interest regarding the existence of this perception. As a result of this interest, the researcher had various ideas about why this perception exists, and had attached a great deal of his own meaning to the perceived social phenomenon. These thoughts and meaning around the *Nice Guy Paradox* are precisely what he had to bracket in order to conduct the phenomenological interviews. Thus, he had to be highly aware of his own preconceptions about the phenomenon in order to make sure that he was really open to hearing and fully understanding the participants' particular experiences of the *Nice Guy Paradox*. For example, he had to guard against leading or guiding the interview so as to elicit the information that he expected and was most interested in hearing. By doing this, the researcher became aware of his desire to confirm his own ideas and realized the importance of bracketing with regards to the integrity of any phenomenological study.

The ultimate product of any interview is a record of the data that it yields. The recording of data captured in the current study is discussed below.

4.2.2.3 Transcription

Generally speaking, participant responses in open-ended interviews are recorded by means of tape recording and/or note taking. These possibilities need to be assessed in relation to the practical constraints of the situation, the cooperation and approval of the respondent/s, and the specific type of interview selected. There are important advantages to tape recording open-

ended interviews. For example, the researcher does not have to rely on memory or note taking in order to capture the majority of information given by participants. Consequently, recording of interviews is much more accurate, and the researcher is free to concentrate on guiding the interview, noting non-verbal behaviour and requesting clarification when necessary (Punch, 2005). In the case of this study, there was nothing to prohibit this method and all interviews were tape recorded with the permission of the participants involved. In addition, the researcher took notes to record relevant non-verbal behaviour.

On the basis of these recordings and notes, the researcher produced transcriptions including all verbal and non-verbal behaviour that occurred during the interviews. Non-verbal observations made by the researcher were indicated in italics, within parentheses. These transcriptions formed the basis for the analyses that will be presented in later chapters. The method by which these analyses were conducted is described in the following section.

4.2.3 Data analysis



Methods of analysis can be used to organize interview texts, to work out and uncover implicit meanings, and to condense meanings into forms that can be presented in a relatively short space (Kvale, 1996). However, in qualitative research, these methods are extremely diverse and the term *data analysis* itself has different meanings among different qualitative researchers (Punch, 2005). Having said this, psychologists conducting phenomenological research generally make use of a similar series of steps when it comes to the analysis of their interviews (Creswell, 1998). This study made use of the phenomenological steps of analysis outlined by Giorgi (1997), which were discussed in the previous chapter. Thus, the data was analyzed as follows:

4.2.3.1 Step one: Obtaining a global sense of the data

The researcher started by reading the transcriptions of the interviews. This initial reading had the primary focus of gaining a general impression of the data. Thus, the researcher did not attempt to link or make judgments about

any particular aspects of the interviews. The aim was simply to become familiar with each interview as a whole (Giorgi, 1997).

4.2.3.2 Step two: The division of the data into parts

By acquiring a general sense of each interview, the researcher was able to gain an idea about how their parts were constituted, which led to the next step in the analysis. During this step, each interview was divided into parts, based on meaning discrimination. In order to make the necessary divisions, the researcher re-read the interviews more slowly. While doing this, he focused on the different meanings in the text. Each time he experienced a transition in meaning, he marked the place. This resulted in a division of the interviews into different meaning units, as expressed by the participants. Due to the psychological nature of this study, the researcher discriminated the meaning units from within a psychological framework or through a psychological lens. This meant taking on an attitude that was particularly sensitive and attuned to the psychological aspects of the interviews (Giorgi, 1997). Creating meaning units using a psychologically orientated filter pre-empted the next step in the analysis.

4.2.3.3 Step three: The expression of parts in psychological language

Once the psychologically anchored meaning units were established, they were re-examined and re-described in psychological language. Thus, the meaning units were transformed so that they were expressed in terms relevant for the discipline of psychology. Thus, during this step, the disciplinary value of each unit of meaning was made more explicit (Giorgi, 1997).

4.2.3.4 Step four: Determining essential meaning units

When the meaning units had been discriminated and re-described, they were reexamined once again. The aim of this examination was to determine which meaning units were essential to the experience of the *Nice Guy Paradox*, and

which were not. Thus, the researcher used his judgment in order to ascertain which meanings units were most important to the *Nice Guy Paradox*. If a meaning unit could not be discarded without losing something essential about the experience of the *Nice Guy Paradox*, it was identified as being essential to the experience of the perceived social phenomenon (Giorgi, 1997).

4.2.3.5 Step five: Synthesis of meaning units

Once the essential meaning units had been identified, the researcher brought them together in descriptions of the essential structures of the experience of the *Nice Guy Paradox* from a psychological perspective. This was first done intra-individually. In other words, the meaning units that emerged from each interview were synthesized individually in order to derive the essential structures of each participant's experience of the *Nice Guy Paradox*. However, the primary aim during this step was to derive as few structures as possible whilst incorporating all the meaning units that emerged from the descriptions given by the participants. Thus, the meaning units from all the interviews were integrated into central themes.

The central themes were discussed in relation to relevant information from the literature review in order to synthesize a fresh understanding of the *Nice Guy Paradox*. In addition, based on these themes, an essential structure of the participants' common experience of the *Nice Guy Paradox* was synthesized (Giorgi, 1997). On the basis of this structure, recommendations for future research in this area were formulated.

4.3 The validity of the phenomenological approach

In order for a phenomenological study to be considered valid, there must be a harmonious relation between the intentions of the participants, and the meanings explicated by the researcher (Kvale, 1989). To demonstrate this harmonious relation, phenomenological research must subject its procedures and analyses to scrutiny by anyone that wishes to assess its validity (Kruger,

1988). Thus, a phenomenological study needs to be as transparent as possible. In this way, the reader can decide on its validity for him/herself.

This study has attempted to provide as much clarity as possible with regards to the methods, procedures and analyses that it has employed. In the chapters that follow, the data collected by the researcher is analyzed. However, this analysis begins with the presentation of the original interview transcripts. Thus, each step in the analysis is completely transparent, which allows the reader to decide for him/herself whether he/she agrees with the way in which the researcher has explicated meaning units, re-described these meaning units and decided upon the essential structures of the experience of the *Nice Guy Paradox*. Because of this clarity and transparency, this research can claim phenomenological validity. However, the nature of this type of study dictates that the ultimate decision about whether or not this research is valid, will be left up to the people that read it.

Nevertheless, as an initial measure of validity, the researcher gave the transcripts and the step by step analyses of these transcripts back to the individual participants for their scrutiny. This was done in order to gain their approval with regards to the content and accuracy of the data collection and data analysis processes. In cases where participants disagreed with meanings captured by the researcher, the appropriate changes were made. By doing this, the researcher aimed to ensure that only meanings truly intended by the participants would remain a part of this research.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the general and specific aims of this study. It then discussed in detail, the actual procedure that was followed. The qualitative, purposive sampling method was described, and the phenomenological and research-specific criteria for participant selection were outlined. In addition, the practical protocol with regards to the sourcing of participants was explicated. The interview process was then described. This included a discussion of the open-ended nature the interview, the phenomenological

method of bracketing that was used, and the method used in order to record the data that was captured. A description of the data analysis procedure was also provided. Lastly, this chapter explicated the basis on which this phenomenological study can claim to be valid.

The following chapter introduces participant **A** and details the analysis of her interview.



CHAPTER 5

INTRA-INDIVIDUAL ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPANT A'S EXPERIENCE OF THE NICE GUY PARADOX

This chapter introduces participant **A** and provides some of her relevant biographical information. It also contains the researcher's impression of participant **A**, followed by a transcription of her interview. Finally, this chapter provides an analysis of participant **A**'s interview.

5.1 Introduction

At the time of the interview, participant **A** was 23 years old. She was studying towards an honours degree in medical physiology at Wits University and was living with a friend in Melville, Johannesburg. She is white and her first language is English.

Participant **A**'s parents got divorced when she was 12 years old and she has been in one significant romantic relationship in her life. She met this boyfriend when she was 16 years old, through sport and friends at school. The relationship lasted about six years, although there were lengthy periods during those years in which they were not together. Overall, she says that it was a good relationship experience, although complicated at times. Since this relationship, she has had a few other short romantic relationships. Some of these relationships were with men that she perceived as *nice guys*. Participant **A** says that these relationship experiences were generally good, but that she ended up becoming disinterested in most of them. At the time of the interview, participant **A** was not involved in a romantic relationship. However, she said that she would like to get into another relationship if she met the right person.

5.2 The researcher's impression of participant A

Participant **A** was casually dressed and well-groomed. Her manner was friendly and enthusiastic, and considering the personal nature of the interview, she seemed relatively relaxed and comfortable. Her voice was loud and clear, and she spoke quickly and spontaneously about her experience. She talked about her self as well as other people and sometimes used examples to illustrate her meaning. At times, her movements and facial expressions were somewhat animated as she discussed and mused over the interview topic. It seemed that participant **A** was considering the interview question thoroughly and sincerely, and she appeared to respond openly and honestly.

5.3 Transcription of participant A's interview

Interviewer: Please describe honestly and in as much detail as possible, your experience of the nice guy paradox.

Participant A: Ok (*smiles*), well... I'll tell you that the nice guys that I've like come into contact with, or met, or seen in relationships with other girls are those guys that are kind of shy, always willing to please (*clears her throat*), generally not very assertive, like in what they want. So it's... in the relationships that I've seen nice guys in, or maybe that I've been involved in, the guy's definitely not the dominant party. And um, I think that for an example, this relationship of a friend that I know, where they were together for a really long time and he's a typical nice guy. Like everyone's his mate, everyone loves him, such a nice guy, so sweet or whatever, but then I think she took a lot of advantage... how do you say it... took advantage of him. 'Cos he kind of wouldn't get angry with her for doing stuff, wouldn't like kind of put his foot down, so she got away with being with other people and not really putting in as much effort as she should but then at the same time was getting more than a hundred percent from him. So... make sense? That's one... um, I also think nice guys definitely don't come across as the alpha male of society so girls aren't gonna really wanna, I dunno, maybe it's evolutionary. Like an in-built thing, girls wanna be with, obviously the guy that's gonna be strong and provide them with stuff and it's kind of, not always a conscious thought but it's definitely there I think. And I think nice guys might seem like they gonna be, like come second to other guys. Um, so... girls are definitely gonna go for a guy that's much more independent and kind of hard rather than somebody who's gonna let them take the lead, I think. And also, there was this guy that I was friends with at varsity. I was friends with him since first year. He's never had a girlfriend. Wasn't... had any girlfriends at varsity, was completely... like we

had a very platonic relationship. Um... and there was definitely like, I think feelings from his side that I'd like heard about (*smiles*) and he told me about but I wasn't obviously reciprocating any of these feelings. And um... ja, he was just a nice guy, sort of good looking, not like bad looking. Generally like, just like the kind of person that girls would be like, "Ja he'd make such a good boyfriend but I don't want to be with him," type of guy. And then in fourth year, he found a girlfriend, and all of a sudden (*hand gestures*), now he was like, all of a sudden there was, he was just this kind of, he had this different appeal about him. I think because, maybe 'cos now other girls think that he's ok, then maybe he is ok. So I definitely think that the nice guy thing can kind of be, like sort of overshadowed by the fact that they might be with other people. So they definitely can lose the finish last thing 'cos if they are with other people then they seem, I dunno, better (*laughs*). Does that make sense? Um... ja, I dunno what else...ok, with guys in my experience who've um... I've been in short, sort of relationships, seen them for like a month, two months or whatever. Um... guys that have been too keen, like too eager to see you, always available, always saying, "well I don't mind, what do you want to do?" or "I don't mind if you come over later" or "I don't mind if we had plans and now you want to go and do something else." Those guys you lose interest in quite quickly 'cos it's definitely the fact that they not assertive and independent I think is the major factor why nice guys finish last. They don't seem to have this kind of, that they're their own independent person. I think that's the most important part and I've definitely gotten over them because of that and haven't really felt like any sparks 'cos there's no, I didn't have to put any effort in. I was just... I could do what I wanted. It was kind of, not ideal. I don't think there's enough of a dynamic like that. Are you gonna say anything? (*laughs*)...

Interviewer: What about your one main relationship. How does it relate to that?

Participant A: The nice guy? Um...(sighs) well, ok, I think he's a nice guy, but I don't think that he would particularly fit into the nice guy category. Because the nice guy category that I would say was the guy who's kind of willing to please, gonna do what ever you want to, not very dominant kind of thing. Because definitely, I wasn't allowed to run around doing whatever I wanted to and I definitely like had to put effort in and I definitely didn't feel like the dominant person. If anything I don't really feel like there was a dominant person, which is more ideal, so there's an equal balance. So I don't... maybe the reason why that worked and lasted was because it wasn't a typical nice guy thing. So I wouldn't... ja I can definitely relate 'cos that worked 'cos I didn't see him as this nice guy kind of pushover kind of thing. It definitely, ja, wasn't like that. So that's why it worked and why the other relationships where maybe I have been with nice guys, typical nice guys, haven't. So ja...

Interviewer: So am I understanding that your typical nice guy is essentially... (*interrupted*)

Participant A: ...a push over

Interviewer: ...weak? Or a push over?

Participant A: I think ja, ja I would say so 'cos I can see nice guys finishing last in terms of being in relationships with women. But also it's the kind of guy like at work, everyone's going out for drinks on Friday and they leave him to like do photocopying or something 'cos he's not gonna say, "No, I wanna, I've got other plans." Do you know what I mean? So I think it's the same. Ja I think the nice guy is the guy that's always saying "yes," never says "no," and doesn't ja, always eager to please, kind of guy.

Interviewer: And that's why everyone calls him "nice?"

Participant A: And also, that's why girls would be like, "Ja he'd make such an awesome boyfriend 'cos he'd treat his girlfriend like gold." "He'll treat her like a princess and she'll be up on this pedestal and it'll be awesome." And every girl says that she wants a boyfriend who's gonna treat her like that, but I think it's not necessarily very practical. So they kind of not going to go for it or it's not going to work out even though they'll say, "Ja, he would make such a nice boyfriend but I'm just not that into him," kind of thing, which is definitely the case I find. With all the nice guys that I've met it's always been, "Ja he would make such a nice boyfriend, he would be awesome, she'd be the luckiest girl, but it's not me." And then it's kind of like, "Ja, he's not good looking, I'm not attracted to him, like looks wise." But I definitely, I think it's possibly because he's a nice guy that you not attracted to him 'cos I mean when this guy did get a girlfriend, he was quite attractive looking (*smiles*) and definitely, I was like, "Maybe I should have actually pursued that option." (*smiles*) But previously I wouldn't have if I hadn't seen him with anybody else. So maybe like, I'm kind of thinking to myself, "If nobody else is with this guy, maybe he's not so great," I dunno, even though he would be great. And then ironically enough, he has been with this girl for quite a long time. So maybe she doesn't think that he's such a nice guy and he kind of feels like he can, he doesn't idolise her enough that he can, that he kind of does have a bit more authority. I dunno, but this is all just perceptions of people, you don't really know how they are in a relationship.

Interviewer: Ja

Participant A: Ja

Interviewer: And in say your own relationship, you spoke about, um, how would you like a guy to treat you?

Participant A: (*sighs*) Um... I definitely think that a guy should allow you to be... like you should feel comfortable. You shouldn't feel like you can't do anything when you're in a relationship with a guy. Like you shouldn't feel inhibited and you shouldn't feel like he doesn't

let you be yourself, do things that you would normally do otherwise. So for example, if somebody breaks, when you break up with someone and you say stuff like, "Ja well I just wanna be me, I just want to do stuff that I want to do now that I'm single," I think that's kind of an indication that your relationship was sour in the first place. 'Cos you should be able to do that so I definitely think a guy shouldn't... like shouldn't put too many constraints on you. And I also think, ja, he should obviously respect you, treat you nicely, the same way that you would treat a friend. But then obviously if you care for the person you gonna definitely keep them in mind, keep like conscious of them. So I dunno, if you're in a relationship with someone they definitely gonna play a part of your life. They're not just something that is like just something on your to do list like "Oh I've got to go and see my girlfriend now but actually I really want to go home, 'cos I'm feakin tired and I've been exercising the whole day and I've been working and this and that." You know it should kind of be like "Ja, I'm quite excited to go and see my girlfriend now I can just go and relax with her, I don't need to be by my..." I dunno, does that make sense? Like not something on your list, but rather something to help you deal with your list of things to do. So I'd definitely much rather be treated as a participant in a relationship rather than something that's a burden at some points.

Interviewer: And in relation to the nice guy? I mean that sounds how the nice guy may treat you?...

Participant A: Um... ja obviously the nice guy would treat you... like with respect, but guys that are not nice guys could also do the same thing. But then they don't hovel and the whole dynamic of the relationship is different because you're both equal, you're not, you're not continuously wanting the other person to be more than they are. You know you kind of, with a guy who's independent, who kind of says well no I'm doing this, then I think it's better. I dunno, um...someone who lets the decisions be made equally I suppose rather than someone who's like "Ja, ok, what ever you want to do, that's fine with me, it's your decision, I don't mind," ja...

Interviewer: So is it finding a balance in a way between your needs and like compromising, but not compromising too much?

Participant A: Ja, I think it's definitely about having an equal balance. So with this long relationship (*smiles*) that I had, at one stage, I was spending all my time at his house 'cos I was staying in res, so there was no boys allowed. And then after a while that definitely (*hand gestures*) did impact my perception of the relationship because I felt that I was spending all my time in his space and it was always with him and always in his space which... When you're in somebody else's space, naturally, they're gonna be more dominant because it's their house and you're kind of like a guest there even though you are in a relationship as long as you spend time there. Then so I was definitely feeling like I was not playing an equal part and

not being allowed to have an equal say in things and that definitely impacted me. So, I mean it definitely was a problem, so, I mean obviously, it goes both ways so if the guy is way too dominant and way too restrictive, way too independent and doesn't really take you into account at all, that's gonna be the bad guy. The not nice guys in your life I guess, which would kind of be the opposite of the nice guy who's just the yes guy.

Interviewer: So are the bad guys attractive?

Participant A: Um...well I mean if you have a spectrum, you've got the nice guy on one side and the bad guy on the other side who's a complete jerk who kind of doesn't really care, is gonna do what he wants anyway, not gonna take anything that you say into account. Which initially, ja, might be attractive because he's probably like pretty cool, probably quite a popular guy, I dunno, probably pretty good looking generally because I'm supposing that there's a bit of a separation between the nice guy and not so nice guy. And um... ja, so initially he might be attractive but that can only last so long. So if you do enter into a relationship with a bad guy, you are obviously gonna get over it because nobody's happy with like an imbalance either way... I think.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a bit about how looks play into it, with reference to the nice guy that you were talking about, but also the badder guy. Where do looks, are they equally distributed, or... (*interrupted*).

Participant A: No, I would say that they're not. I would say the nice guy's probably... probably those guys that when you first see them you're not like, "Oh my gosh that guy's so hot!" stereotypically compared to what you would think was hot or what society might think is good looking. But they're not necessarily like bad looking guys, they just might not be, like walk into a room or girls would notice them out of a crowd kind of guys. Whereas the not nice guys are probably better looking guys, they probably not have had to work so hard. Maybe, um... like, growing up, and stuff. I think it definitely makes a difference like you don't just become a nice guy or a not nice guy. It's like who you become through your relationships and interactions with other people. So I mean, and obviously your personality to start off with. So the nice guy might initially, like if he say for example had been in a different environment and he's kind of an ok looking guy like this guy I was talking about, and he's friends with jocks and he's doing that whole vibe, he might come across as not such a nice guy, which would make him probably more attractive. Which is, I mean if you think about school and stuff, there was the jock group, and there was always that one or two guys in that group that weren't really good looking. But I mean if you had to put them, I mean they didn't really like fit in, but they were still just as good as everybody else. Just as good in terms of the, like they didn't stand out, they weren't neglected by the ladies or anything like that. So I think personality is probably more of a factor than looks but I think it is separated.

Interviewer: So would you say that on the whole, nice guys are less good looking?

Participant A: Ja... I would say so... I dunno, ja I would definitely say so. I think most people would agree with me... (*long pause*) um... what else?

Interviewer: Any reason why?

Participant A: Ja maybe because they've had to, maybe they're not good looking so they've had to work harder. It's like a pretty girl. Pretty girls kind of get away with a lot of stuff so whereas not so pretty girls maybe have more depth stereotypically. Um... so I think it's the same thing with nice guys. So you get these really sweet girls (*soft imitating tone*) that are just friends with everyone. I think that's like the female version of the nice guy. So I would say there are nice girls which are kind of the girls that guys are like ja, "I wouldn't mind marrying a girl like that, she'd make a nice housewife, a nice mother..." Ja...but I reckon (*loud*) it's also like deep rooted in terms of us as humans and animals and stuff. Like just the same as any other animal there's gonna be like, there's the dominant male, who's gonna prevent other males coming into the herd or like killing off other young males. So like he's dominant and his genes carry on or whatever, and the females obviously need to be impressed by this guy so he needs to be, maybe aggressive to get rid of the other guys around. I think it's sort of, I think that if you had to draw a relationship with humans, I think it definitely is the same. Like the more dominant guy, the guy who subconsciously you might think that he's definitely gonna be stronger, definitely gonna be a better provider, maybe a like better father, maybe he's gonna be able to protect you, I dunno whatever might be going on in your brain back there... versus the nice guy who might not be as dominant, so I think girls are definitely gonna go for the more dominant guy. Like just naturally, and then if a nice guy does get a girl friend it kind of like triggers the fact that maybe, actually, I might be missing something (*smiles*). Maybe he is actually, there is something there that's gonna be, he is actually these things that I initially thought he wasn't. 'Cos now he's with somebody else, if she thinks he's ok then maybe he is ok. But I reckon that it's not like thoughts that go on in your head and you consciously thinking about it, but I definitely think if you had to draw parallels, I think there definitely are... on the whole. Ja...

Interviewer: In terms of this perception, how much do you think it has relevance in all your friends and the people you know, is it a strong phenomenon?

Participant A: (*sighs*) Um... I would say that it's strong in terms of if there is a nice guy then you can definitely see the perception there. But also, I think on the whole spectrum (*hand gestures*) you probably have like, the nice guys which are quite a small population, then you have general kind of guys and then there's the not nice guys, which is also quite small. So you might not come across that many nice guys in your lifetime. So you might not think that it

plays a big role but if you do come across one and you do maybe enter into a relationship with one ever, then you'll definitely see that it is there I think. So I think it's strong if you're in contact but if you're not around nice guys you're gonna say that "Ja well I don't really think so 'cos I've never seen one." But if you have then you'll think "Ja, I think so." So I think it definitely has to do with the amount of nice guys that you've met. I mean you might walk the path where there's nice guys all over the place and then think that it's just this crazy thing that all these nice guys are just getting shafted the whole time. But if you never see them then you wouldn't know. It's like what you observe I suppose, what you wanna see (*emphasis*), I think. So if you, like now that I've like talked about this, you'll definitely gonna impact like what I see out and like what I perceive now for maybe a little while. I'll definitely be thinking about it so I'll probably be seeing... or I might not 'cos it might not be on my brain. Ja, that's what I think.

Interviewer: And any other ideas around... anything to add?

Participant A: Um... (*long pause*) I think one thing with nice guys is that there's normally like the surprise factor, I think. So you might kind of not be interested in them and then you know you kind of get to know them and sort of start being attracted to them. They always kind of, 'cos it's just a perception, it's just a stereotype. If you do get into a relationship with them they might like surprise you in such a way that actually now all of a sudden they're great. Now there's been this massive attraction all of a sudden. I think maybe for example, let's just say, sexually, they might have this surprisingly good talent, or not. Or maybe he's actually really funny, or maybe he's something. But they normally have like, I think, something about them that doesn't come across directly when you first meet them.

Interviewer: And the surprise factor... is that generally important in a relationship? Can you talk a bit more about what that means?

Participant A: Um... ja I think it is important because I think obviously relationships are based on excitement and interest (*talking quickly*). So if you lose interest in someone because they're boring or you see the same thing the whole time and it's not dynamic then you definitely are going to lose interest and you're not gonna wanna continue on. But if someone can bring something to the table that's different, something you haven't experienced before or something that continues, like somebody who's dynamic, so somebody that has depth, so if they continuously surprising you in terms of like who they are or their reactions to certain things or like what they find amusing or how they would handle a situation that's stressful, for example, that's definitely attractive. A guy who's level headed, that's a surprise factor 'cos you wouldn't like, surprise factors are things that you wouldn't normally, people wouldn't portray in every day life. So something like, if there was a situation that doesn't happen all the time say for example a horrendous (*hand gestures*) accident or you're stranded on table mountain or something, and the guy is particularly strong in that kind of situation, that's definitely a

surprise factor and definitely is important I think. So surprise factor has to do with the fact that you wouldn't generally, you wouldn't see in every day being with someone. So that's why I'm saying like sexually, like you not gonna immediately meet someone and know exactly what they like or what they capable of, or I dunno, if they, if you're even gonna like them or not, so that's a surprise factor 'cos it's something that you wouldn't know other than having been in the situation with that person where they might be particularly good, bad... It works the other way as well, so like if somebody, you think they're nice, you think they're great, you're having an awesome relationship and then all of a sudden a situation arises where they really act in a way that you wouldn't, that you don't like. Definitely, or I think that also has a big impact. It's like do you really wanna be with somebody (*frowning*) who's like that. Although up until that point, if you had never been in that situation you would never have known. But um... ja, so I think it's important, that's a surprise factor.

Interviewer: Ok is that... (*interrupted*)

Participant A: I think that's, is that long enough? Do you need more stuff?

Interviewer: No, no, it's just as much as you have to say.

Participant A: Ok, then that's I think everything.

Interviewer: Ok cool, well, thanks a lot.

Participant A: Ok (*laughs*) thanks [name of interviewer].

5.4 Analysis and discussion of participant A's experience

The analysis of participant **A's** interview was done according to the phenomenological framework outlined by Giorgi (1997). After carefully reading the transcription, it was possible to start dividing participant **A's** interview into parts based on meaning discrimination. Thus, distinct meaning units were discriminated and re-described in psychological language. These meaning units are discussed in the sections that follow.

5.4.1 Characteristics of nice guys according to participant A

In relation to the *Nice Guy Paradox*, participant **A** described a very specific type of man. According to participant **A**, the *nice guys* referred to by the *Nice Guy Paradox* possess the following characteristics:

5.4.1.1 Nice guys try hard to please other people

Participant **A** explained that *nice guys* try hard to make other people happy and tend to be well-liked by those that know them.

- “[...*nice guys* are] always eager to please...”
- “[...*nice guys* are] always saying ‘yes,’...”
- “...everyone’s his [the *nice guy*’s] mate, everyone loves him, such a nice guy, so sweet...”

5.4.1.2 Nice guys are shy and unassertive

According to participant **A**, *nice guys* do not confidently assert themselves with other people.

- “[...*nice guys* are] kind of shy...”
- “[...*nice guys* are] generally not very assertive...”

5.4.1.3 Nice guys are submissive

Participant **A** indicated that *nice guys* are not dominant men.

- “[...[the *nice guy* is] definitely not the dominant party [in the relationship].”
- “[...*nice guys* definitely don’t come across as the alpha male [dominant male]...”

In fact, she seemed to suggest that these men tend to be submissive in relationships.

- “[...[a *nice guy* is] a push over.”

- "...he [a *nice guy*]... wouldn't get angry with her for doing stuff, wouldn't like kind of put his foot down..."

5.4.1.4 Nice guys are dependent

According to participant **A**, *nice guys* seem to be relatively dependent on other people.

- "They [*nice guys*] don't seem to have this kind of, that they're their own independent person."
- "...[*nice guys* are] not assertive and independent..."

Based on participant **A's** experience, *nice guys* possess all the above characteristics. The following section discusses participant **A's** ideas about how *nice guys* finish last.

5.4.2 Participant A's experience of how nice guys finish last

According to Participant **A**, the *nice guys* discussed above do tend to finish last when it comes to relationships with women. These guys finish last in the following ways.

5.4.2.1. Nice guys are rejected by women

Participant **A** claimed that *nice guys* tend to be rejected by women as potential partners.

- "...[women say] 'Ja he'd make such a good boyfriend [the *nice guy*] but I don't want to be with him, '..."
- "[women say] 'He'll [the *nice guy*] treat her [his girlfriend] like a princess and she'll be up on this pedestal and it'll be awesome ...but I'm just not that into him."

5.4.2.2 Nice guys are exploited in relationships

Participant **A** claimed that due to their personality characteristics, when *nice guys* do get into relationships, they often get exploited.

- "...she [a *nice guy's* girlfriend]... took advantage of him [a *nice guy*]."
- "...she [a *nice guy's* girlfriend] got away with being with other people and not really putting in as much effort [into the relationship] as she should but then at the same time was getting more than a hundred percent [effort] from him [a *nice guy*]."

According to participant **A**, *nice guys* are rejected by women and exploited in relationships. They are vulnerable to exploitation in relationships due to their personality characteristics. The factors underlying their rejection by women are discussed below.

5.4.3 Participant A's experience of why nice guys are rejected by women

Participant **A** explained that the *nice guys* referred to by the *Nice Guy Paradox* are often rejected by women because they are not as attractive as other men for three reasons. These reasons are discussed in the sections that follow.

5.4.3.1 Nice guys are less physically attractive than other men

Participant **A** claimed that *nice guys* tend to be less physically attractive than other men.

- "...when you first see them [*nice guys*] you're not like oh my gosh that guy's so hot..."
- "...not nice guys are probably better looking guys [than *nice guys*]..."

In fact, she seemed to suggest that physically unattractive males often become *nice guys* in response to the social consequences of being physically unattractive. This was her way of explaining the assertion that *nice guys* tend to be less physically attractive than other men.

- "...you become [a *nice guy* or not nice guy] through your relationships and interactions with other people... [*nice guys* are] not good looking so they've had to work harder [to be accepted than other guys]."
- "...[not nice guys have not] had to work so hard [to be accepted]...growing up..."

5.4.3.2 Women prefer dominant, strong men to nice guys

Participant **A** argued that women are attracted to men that are perceived to be dominant and strong, unlike *nice guys*.

- "...girls are definitely going to go for the more dominant guy."
- "...girls wanna be with... the guy that's gonna be strong..."

Participant **A** suggested that for evolutionary reasons, women subconsciously believe that dominant, strong men are better protectors and providers than *nice guys*.

- "...maybe it's evolutionary [women's preference for dominant, strong men]... subconsciously you might think that... [a dominant, strong man is] definitely gonna be a better provider [than a *nice guy*]... [and] be able to protect you [better than a *nice guy*]..."

5.4.3.3 Nice guys give women too much power in relationships

Participant **A** explained that because of their personality characteristics, *nice guys* tend to give women too much power in relationships. Participant **A** prefers a more equal power balance.

- "...[in relationships *nice guys* are] too keen... too eager to see you, always available..."
- "...[in relationships *nice guys* are] always saying, 'well I don't mind, what do you want to do?' or 'I don't mind if you [only] come over later' or 'I don't mind if we had plans and now you want to go and do something else.'"
- "...[in relationships with *nice guys*] I didn't have to put any effort in... I could do what I wanted."
- "...[a desirable relationship is] definitely about having an equal balance [of power]."

Participant **A** believes that for a woman, having all the power in a relationship is not desirable because it is unexciting and uninteresting.

- “I don’t think there’s enough of a dynamic [when the woman has too much power in a relationship].”
- “...(I) haven’t really felt any sparks [when given too much power in relationships]...”
- “Those guys [men that give women too much power in relationships] you lose interest in quite quickly...”

According to participant **A**, *nice guys* are not as attractive as other men for the reasons discussed above. However, the following section discusses the circumstances under which *nice guys* can become attractive.

5.4.4 Participant A’s experience of nice guys becoming attractive/desirable

Participant **A** explained that under certain conditions, *nice guys* can become attractive to women. These conditions are discussed below.

5.4.4.1 Nice guys can become attractive/desirable when other women find them attractive

According to participant **A**, *nice guys* sometimes become more attractive when they manage to attain the affection of other women.

- “And then in fourth year, he [a nice guy] found a girlfriend...And all of a sudden...he had this different appeal about him...”
- “...I [participant **A**] was like, ‘Maybe I should have actually pursued that option [when it was available]’”
- “... I [participant **A**] might be missing something (*smiles*)... if she [another woman] thinks he’s ok then maybe he [a *nice guy*] is ok.”

5.4.4.2 Nice guys can become attractive/desirable when they surprise women

Participant **A** explained that if a nice guy surprises a woman in some way, and she discovers something new and unexpected about him, it can lead to increased attractiveness.

- "...they [*nice guys*] might surprise you in a way that actually now all of a sudden they're great."
- "...sexually, they [*nice guys*] might have this surprisingly good talent..."
- "Or maybe he's [*a nice guy*] actually really funny..."
- "...or how they [*nice guys*] handle a situation that's stressful [could be attractive]..."

The following section discusses the trait of niceness in men.

5.4.5 Niceness is a desirable trait in men

According to participant **A**, niceness in itself is a desirable characteristic in a man.

- "...[a man] should obviously respect you, treat you nicely, the same way that you would treat a friend."
- "...[a man] should allow you to feel comfortable... [and] shouldn't put too many constraints on you..."

Participant **A** clearly values the trait of niceness in men (in isolation). The following section illustrates that being nice does not necessarily put men at a disadvantage with women.

5.4.6 Participant A's experience of nice men that are not typical nice guys

Participant **A** claimed that not all nice men are *nice guys*. She explained that some men are likeable and respectful, but do not also possess the other characteristics that are typical of *nice guys*. According to participant **A** the *Nice Guy Paradox* does not apply to these men.

- "...he's [participant **A**'s ex-boyfriend] a nice guy, but I don't think that he would particularly fit into the nice guy category... I wasn't allowed to run around doing whatever I wanted to and I definitely like had to put effort in and I definitely didn't feel like I was the dominant person... maybe the reason why that [relationship] worked and lasted was because it wasn't a typical nice guy thing."
- "...[*nice guys*] would treat you... with respect... [but other guys] could also do the same thing. But then they [other guys] don't hovel and the whole dynamic of the relationship is different because you're both equal..."

The following section brings together the meaning units from participant **A**'s interview in order to describe the essential structure of her experience of the *Nice Guy Paradox*.

5.5 A synthesis of meaning units from participant A's interview

The essential structure of participant **A**'s experience of the *Nice Guy Paradox* seems to be the following:

The *nice guys* referred to by the *Nice Guy Paradox* try hard to please other people and are unassertive, submissive and dependent. These *nice guys* do finish last, in the sense that they tend to be rejected by women and exploited in relationships. They are exploited in relationships due to their unassertive, submissive, dependent personality characteristics. They are rejected by women because they are not as attractive as other men for various reasons. To start with, *nice guys* tend to be less physically attractive than other men, and have actually become *nice guys* partly due to their relatively unattractive appearances. Secondly, *nice guys* are not dominant, and for evolutionary reasons, do not seem as capable of providing and protecting as other men. Thirdly, due to their defining personality characteristics, *nice guys* do not claim much power in their relationships with women, which results in these relationships being less interesting and exciting for the women involved, than relationships with other men.

Nice guys can become attractive to women under certain conditions. For instance, they sometimes become attractive to women when they manage to

attain the affection of other women. In addition, in relationships, they can become attractive to women when they surprise them with unexpected virtues.

Niceness in itself is a desirable characteristic in a man. The *Nice Guy Paradox* does not apply to likeable, respectful men that do not possess the other characteristics typical of *nice guys*.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced and given the researcher's impression of participant **A**. It has also provided a transcription and analysis of participant **A**'s interview. The analysis detailed in this chapter has yielded what the researcher believes to be the essential structure of participant **A**'s experience of the *Nice Guy Paradox*.

The following chapter introduces participant **B** and details the analysis of her interview.



CHAPTER 6

INTRA-INDIVIDUAL ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPANT B'S EXPERIENCE OF THE NICE GUY PARADOX

This chapter introduces participant **B** and provides some of her relevant biographical information. It also contains the researcher's impression of participant **B**, followed by a transcription of her interview. Finally, this chapter provides an analysis of participant **B**'s interview.

6.1 Introduction

At the time of the interview, participant **B** was 23 years old. She was a fifth year medical student at Wits University. Participant **B** was living with her family in Sandown, Johannesburg. She is white and her first language is English.

Participant **B**'s parents are married. She says that they are still in love and have a very stable relationship. Participant **B** has been in four relationships in her life. She first became romantically involved when she was 18 years old. Participant **B** met her first boyfriend through friends at university and described this relationship as tumultuous, hurtful and confusing. However, according to participant **B**, her second relationship was her worst romantic experience. This boyfriend was not what he seemed and let participant **B** down. Participant **B** perceived her third boyfriend as a *nice guy*. She ended this relationship because she felt that this boyfriend was more involved with her than she was with him. Participant **B** is currently involved in her fourth relationship. She has been in this relationship for a year and a half, and describes it as good and stable.

6.2 The researcher's impression of participant B

Participant **B** was casually dressed and well-groomed. She seemed slightly shy, but was friendly and open, and had a calm presence. Her voice was soft and she spoke in a measured, unhurried manner. She talked about herself as well as other people and sometimes used examples to illustrate her meaning. Although she quietly emphasized certain points, she generally maintained her composure and was not very animated. Participant **B** claimed to have thought a lot about the interview topic and seemed to respond thoroughly and sincerely.

6.3 Transcription of participant B's interview

Interviewer: Please describe honestly and in as much detail as possible, your experience of the nice guy paradox.

Participant B: Ok, well firstly I'd like to explain about other people and then I'll explain about myself (*softly spoken*). But I think that it depends on the definition of nice firstly. 'Cos that's quite broad, and no one's fully nice or fully not. But I'll take it as, you know, a general thing. The first thing is it also, well I've been thinking about it a lot and it also depends on the age of the person and where they are in their lives. 'Cos I think that it applies more at certain ages than other times. And the first, um... I have a scenario or whatever, is my friend. She went out with this guy when she was in standard nine and he was amazing, like he ran after her, he would do anything for her. And even after they broke up, he'd like bring her diet coke when she was studying, he'd do anything for her or any of her friends... but not just because they were going out, just because he was a really nice person. Um... and I think that she felt claustrophobic and I think that she went out with him 'cos she needed more protection more than that she loved him, um... at that stage. And I think that he's still in love with her. He'll do just anything for her, he runs after her, and I think it annoys her more than anything. And I think she still sees him out of duty and hasn't had a relationship since, but that (*laughs*) probably fits into the scenario. The second thing is that the same girl after that, like directly after that went out with this guy who actually stole her from his friend. His friend said he tried to pursue her because it was a challenge. She's very beautiful and very clever, um, and desired by lots and lots of boys and he managed to break her down, like completely. Um... always pulling her down, they were studying the same thing, um, I mean he's a doctor, um, making him sound more intelligent, always ridiculing what she had to say. Um... and she actually, all in all, I think they went out and broke up three times, it was about two years, and she just stayed with him. She kept taking him back, um, he wouldn't even greet her friends or

he'd fight with them. He wasn't even that handsome, um, and he was cocky and arrogant. But she found him more appealing than the last one, um, so I just, I found that quite interesting. Um, and the same girl then broke up with him, a few weeks later, I think, now she's looking for someone more considerate to stay with for a long time. More of a mixture, like he's stable, he doesn't run after her too much, but he's very decent to her. And I think that's what I mean about the age, because I think that when you're younger, you look for more excitement than permanence, so you're looking for someone for now and it doesn't really matter if they're not that stable or that nice to you. I think it's more the excitement than anything. And then when you're older, especially with women, even if they don't say so I think its programmed into your mind that, um... that you want stability and you want someone that you could perhaps have children with and get married to. I think it's like biologically programmed. So I think that you more likely to go for a nicer guy than one that gives you thrills, um, so that's the first thing. Can I change, is that...

Interviewer: Maybe tell me a bit about the excitement, what is it about the not nice guy that's exciting and the nice guy that's not exciting?

Participant B: I think the guy that isn't that nice, they more, they have less boundaries, they more, tend to do things on the spur of the moment, um, and they can even be more loving to you on the spur of the moment and then not be. So it's like, it's almost like you don't know what to expect so you're always interested, whereas people that follow you, you tend to run away from them, um, especially when you're younger and you're not ready for like permanence. And even when you are, someone that is just gonna follow you around and do what you say and always be there no matter what you do, you'll tend to treat them worse because you know no matter how far you push them, they'll always still be there. And I think that, well, I try not to do it but I did do it and girls do it- like we kind of see how far we can go. And I don't think you can, I think you need, you can't have someone that will just be pushed and pushed and pushed and stay there. I think they'll always end up getting messed around, um, ja... anything?...

Interviewer: That's good, that's all I needed, were you gonna carry on?

Participant B: Well there's another thing, is that my dad's best friend, um, grew up, um, he stole my dad's girlfriend when he was younger. And he's had more women than I've ever seen somebody have. Um, he had like a different girlfriend in every country, I've seen him cheat on women in front of me, often when he was younger. Um, and he always had the most beautiful women, the most exciting women and he was quite handsome and very successful. He's one of the top lawyers in the country and in America, so... But now, so it was almost like he wasn't nice and he did finish first but now that he's older, it's like all his other friends are like married with children and happy and stable, and he's rich and successful and alone. And

all the pretty girls that he used to go for won't go for him unless they want his money. And um, I think it's really sad 'cos I think he actually, he kind of yearns for everything that his friends have that he doesn't have now. Um, and it's like he can't get it back. So I think that there's a danger in the long run of always getting people and then messing them around....

Interviewer: And in your life?

Participant B: Well, ja, in my life. My last boyfriend, well firstly I went out with him because I felt sorry for him. Um, well not sorry but he was just so good to me, and made such an effort, and all he wanted to do was just go out with me, and he never ever ever did anything wrong, he never shouted at me, he never said anything nasty, um, everything he did was to be good to me, in a way. But I think almost like, he'd try too hard, like I think that he changed quite a lot into who I wanted. I only realised that afterwards, and then he changed back afterwards. I think he kind of realised what I wanted and he fitted into that. Um, he changed quite a lot, 'cos I didn't want, at that stage I wasn't very for the physical stuff and everything and he changed completely. He like just agreed and then as soon as we broke up he went and found girls to sleep with, which meant that he didn't actually agree with it, he just pretended to for me. And I just felt more and more claustrophobic, like, um, and I felt guilty and bad, um, that someone was so into me when I wasn't really... I didn't like him enough and you can't help how you feel but you just feel bad and it's really hard to break up with someone who doesn't seem to do anything wrong and when you don't have a reason for it. And I always feel bad about that 'cos I think he's been the nicest to me that anyone has, but I just didn't feel the same as him, and I think that there should be a challenge. Like you can't think that whatever you do it will always be ok. There have to be boundaries... 'cos I have a feeling that I could have cheated on him, numerous times. I could have done anything and he would have always taken me back. Um, and I think if you know that you tend to mess people around and you don't take them as seriously as you should....

Interviewer: Why do you think, what is it about that thing of just being able to do anything that makes you lose interest?

Participant B: I dunno... I do think it's a human thing to like push the boundaries. Like even nice people, if you give them way they'll, if you know that you can act in a certain way and you can get away with certain things now and then you'll use it. You know, you maybe can scream and you can shout, and you won't get a reaction then you'll tend to scream and shout more often. Um, I don't know why that is or why people act like that, or why people lose interest if someone's so into them, but I've seen it all the time. Like as soon as a guy shows a girl a lot of interest when he hasn't they tend to step back a bit. I think they're scared of, maybe they haven't thought properly about being in a relationship or what it would mean or if it's forever or whatever, and as soon as the guy seems too interested, they get a bit scared. But I think that

only really happens when they're not sure about the guy. I think if they're pretty sure about the guy it's usually better.

Interviewer: So do you think niceness is the bad thing?

Participant B: No because I couldn't go out with a guy that I don't think is nice. Like I don't go for people that are gonna mess me around or cheat on me, or scream at me or... I mean I've had friends with boyfriends that have thrown them around, beaten them up, like put their fist through their window. I'd never go out with someone like that 'cos I need the stability and security and I need to be able to look up to someone that I'm going out with. I need them to have certain qualities that I admire and I like. So I think that niceness isn't a problem, I think it's maybe when it's too nice or when they so nice that they put people so far in front of themselves and they don't stand up for themselves and say what they actually feel and just give in all the time. I think that's the problem and I think it's not even in relationships it's just in general. You have to know who you are and you have to stand up for that even if it's sometimes gonna clash with the other person and I think if you're too nice you tend to avoid conflict and you tend to avoid that. So I don't think niceness is the problem.

Interviewer: So the problem is more not standing up for yourself?

Participant B: Ja, I think it's just extreme. It's being too nice and letting yourself be used, always coming back to the girl, doing everything for them, not letting them give you anything back, not letting them have to work in the relationship. 'Cos I think in a relationship it's about people working together.

Interviewer: And what are the effects of acting like that? You've mentioned some already. But what are all the different effects of a guy acting like that? Of being completely, of not standing up for himself, pleasing the girl, doing anything for her, running after her? What are the different feelings that that elicits in a girl?

Participant B: Well the first thing is that, um, I think well personally, firstly it elicits guilt that you don't feel the same way, and that you know that they not doing anything wrong but you still don't like it. You can't really complain about someone doing everything for you. Um, and also like a bit of frustration, 'cos you want someone to stand up for themselves and you want someone to be themselves and you don't want them to just mould into what you want. Um, because then its not real, um, I think those are the main...

Interviewer: You mentioned earlier disinterest?

Participant B: Um, because it's almost like, if you don't have to work at something, you don't have to put in any effort, it's almost like not worth it. It loses the excitement, it just becomes more frustrating than love or fun or anything like that. Um, and you do definitely lose interest. Well, it depends on the girl but if someone just gives and gives and gives, it's not challenging, it's not exciting. Um, I think then you just want out sometimes.

Interviewer: Earlier you were saying something about almost trying to find a balance between... You gave the example of the girl who had the very nice guy I think and then the not so nice guy and then found someone in between... Is that what girls are looking for?

Participant B: I think that's what I look for because you want someone that's like exciting and will just suddenly do something out of the blue and will stand up for themselves. Like I like it when my boyfriend doesn't agree with me or when he says something that might upset me. Not in a horrible way but when he's honest, like I think you want someone to just be themselves. As humans we not completely nice or completely horrible, we have different facets. And I think that it's the different facets of a person, and willing to be themselves and whole, and willing to also admit that they have short-comings, um and also to... 'Cos nice guys might not be as nice as you think. They might just hide that they actually not as nice as they are whereas the balance you're just yourself and you're willing to admit that you do certain things that a girl might not like. Or like, my boyfriend's taken drugs and all sorts of stuff that he's told me about that I don't agree with. I don't think he's the most angelic guy, but I like that because it's more real and I like that he is always honest because when he says like he loves me then I know that he does. Whereas the other one always said it but it like lost it's meaning because, ja, I dunno why (*confused facial expression*)...

Interviewer: Any other ideas on this topic?

Participant B: Any other questions? I'm trying to think. I think it really depends on what a person's looking for as well. Um, because it's weird, there are like patterns. Um, some guys that I know are always messed around they're always cheated on by every single girl that they go out with cheats on them. Um, and some other guys like never, it's never ever happened. I think it's more, sort of patterns of behaviour. I think it's quite interesting. I think it's the whole way that you act or the way that you say things or don't say things that eventually... 'Cos it's weird that that would always happen to one type of person and never to another type of person.

Interviewer: The guys that always get cheated on, would you say that they are nice guys?

Participant B: Usually, I mean there's a guy that lives here that his girlfriend cheated on him and he took her back and then he found out that she'd been sleeping with other people in his

house for years and he wanted to take her back. But it's almost like he acts in the same way and shows the same patterns over and always tends to want the girl back. He also chooses girls that are quite insecure. I think it's maybe a choice, um, they tend to need affection from other people, they tend to need to be validated. So I guess it's not just the nice thing, it's also the choice of person that you choose. But some guys, if they have enough self-esteem, they'll just end it.

Interviewer: So do you think the niceness has something to do with self-esteem?

Participant B: I think it might. I think that people that are honest with themselves, and honest and open and sincere, and they nice when they want and they're not nice when they don't want to be are the nicer people. Whereas the others tend to hide all the stuff they're not happy about and, um, ja, (*laughs*)... I can't really explain...

Interviewer: Do you think that might relate to their self-esteem in some way?

Participant B: Ja, 'cos I think if you're secure with yourself you're more willing to show all of yourself, whereas if you're insecure you tend to try be someone, you try to hide things you're not sure about and tend to run after people and chase people. Um, and tend to just find some person and almost worship them like a god just because you don't think you're good enough to actually have them. So I do think it has some effect.

Interviewer: Well thanks. Any other ideas, or anything to add?

Participant B: (*laughs and shakes her head*)

Interviewer: Well thanks a lot that's been very helpful. And ja, that's very useful information.

Participant B: Cool (*smiles*).

6.4 Analysis and discussion of participant B's experience

The analysis of participant **B**'s interview was done according to the phenomenological framework outlined by Giorgi (1997). After carefully reading the transcription, it was possible to start dividing participant **B**'s interview into parts based on meaning discrimination. Thus, distinct meaning units were discriminated and re-described in psychological language. These meaning units are discussed in the sections that follow.

6.4.1 Characteristics of nice guys according to participant B

Participant **B** described the *nice guys* referred to by the *Nice Guy Paradox* mostly in terms of their behaviour. The following sections discuss the characteristics of these men according to participant **B**.

6.4.1.1 Nice guys treat women well

Participant **B** explained that *nice guys* treat women well in relationships.

- “he [a *nice guy*] was just so good to me [participant **B**]... I think he’s been the nicest to me that anyone has...”
- “...he [a *nice guy*] never ever ever did anything wrong, he never shouted at me [participant **B**], he never said anything nasty...”

6.4.1.2 Nice guys try extremely hard to please women in relationships

According to participant **B**, *nice guys* go beyond just treating women well. In relationships, these men do everything in their power to please women.

- “...he’d [a *nice guy*] try too hard [to please participant **B**]...”
- “...he [a *nice guy*] would do anything for her [participant **B**’s friend]... even after they broke up...”

Consequently, women are not required to take much responsibility for relationships with *nice guys*.

- “...[*nice guys* do not let women] have to work in the relationship.”

6.4.1.3 Nice guys do not show their true selves

Participant **B** argued that in trying extremely hard to please women, *nice guys* do not represent themselves sincerely. For instance, she explained that *nice guys* try to be what they think women want them to be, as opposed to just being themselves.

- “...he [a *nice guy*] didn’t actually agree with it [participant **B**’s opinion], he just pretended to for me.”
- “...I think that he [a *nice guy*] changed quite a lot into who I wanted.”

In addition, she claimed that there is no such thing as a completely nice guy and suggested that *nice guys* put on a façade.

- “As humans we not completely nice or completely horrible, we have different facets.”
- “...nice guys might not be as nice as you think. They might just hide that they’re actually not as nice as they [seem]...”

6.4.1.4 Nice guys are submissive in relationships with women

Participant **B** explained that in relationships, *nice guys* are submissive to women.

- “...they [*nice guys*] don’t stand up for themselves and say what they actually feel... [they] just give in all the time... [they] tend to avoid conflict...”
- “...[*nice guys* just] do what you say...”

In fact, she claimed that even on a very literal, concrete level, these men submit to women’s leadership.

- “...he [a *nice guy*] runs after her [participant **B**’s friend]...”
- “...[a *nice guy*] is just gonna follow you around...”

The following section discusses nice guy characteristics in relation to self esteem.

6.4.2 Nice guy characteristics and low self esteem

Participant **B** argued that *nice guy* characteristics are related to low self esteem.

- “...if you’re secure with yourself you’re more willing to show all of yourself [good and bad]... if you’re insecure [like *nice guys*]... you try to hide things you’re not sure about and tend to run after people...”
- “...[*nice guys*] tend to just find some person and almost worship them like a god... [because they think they’re not] good enough to actually have them.”

The following section discusses the ways in which *nice guys* finish last.

6.4.3 Participant B’s experience of how nice guys finish last

According to Participant **B**, *nice guys* do tend to finish last when it comes to relationships with women. These men finish last in the following ways.

6.4.3.1. Nice guys are mistreated in relationships

Participant **B** claimed that *nice guys* tend to be mistreated by women in relationships.

- “...I think they’ll [*nice guys*] always end up getting messed around...”
- “...they’re [*nice guys*] always cheated on by every single girl...”
- “...you don’t take them [*nice guys*] as seriously as you should...”

6.4.3.2 Women retract from nice guys

Participant **B** explained that women try to avoid/get out of relationships with *nice guys*.

- “...you tend to run away from them [*nice guys*]...”
- “...I think... you just want out [of relationships with *nice guys*]...”
- “...they [women] tend to step back [when *nice guys* show interest]...”

According to participant **B**, women mistreat and retract from *nice guys*. The following section discusses the reasons behind this phenomenon.

6.4.4 Participant B's experience of why nice guys finish last

The sections below discuss participant **B**'s ideas about why women mistreat and/or retract from *nice guys*.

6.4.4.1 Nice guys frustrate women

According to participant **B**, women are frustrated by various *nice guy* characteristics.

- “He'll [a *nice guy*] do just anything for her [participant **B**'s friend], he runs after her, and I think it annoys her...”
- “...[*nice guys* elicit] frustration [in women] ‘cos you want someone to stand up for themselves and you want someone to be themselves...”

6.4.4.2 Nice guys make women feel scared and trapped

Participant **B** claimed that men with *nice guy* characteristics make women feel scared and trapped in relationships.

- “...[women often] haven't thought properly about being in a relationship or what it would mean if it's forever... the [*nice*] guy seems too interested, they [women] get a bit scared.”
- “...I just felt more and more claustrophobic [in a relationship with a *nice guy*]... it's really hard to break up with someone who doesn't seem to do anything wrong...”

6.4.4.3 Relationships with nice guys are not interesting and exciting

According to participant **B**, relationships with *nice guys* are not challenging, interesting or exciting.

- “...if you don't have to work at something [a relationship], you don't have to put in any effort, it's almost like not worth it. It loses the excitement... and you do definitely lose interest.”
- “...if someone [the other person] just gives and gives and gives [in a relationship], it's not challenging, it's not exciting.”

6.4.4.4 Nice guys make women feel guilty

When she was in a relationship with a *nice guy*, participant **B** felt guilty about not feeling as strongly for him, as he seemed to feel for her.

- “[...][being in a relationship with a *nice guy*] elicits guilt that you don’t feel the same way [as the *nice guy*]...”
- “...I felt guilty and bad, um, that someone [a *nice guy*] was so into me when... I didn’t like him enough...”

6.4.4.5 Nice guys allow women to mistreat them

Participant **B** claimed that *nice guys* sometimes get mistreated by women because they are submissive and simply allow it to happen.

- “...you’ll tend to treat them [*nice guys*] worse because you know no matter how far you push them, they’ll always still be there.”
- “...[if you don’t] get a reaction [from a guy when you scream and shout at him] then you’ll tend to scream and shout [at him] more often.”

6.4.4.6 Nice guys choose insecure women

Participant **B** explained that *nice guys* often choose insecure women, who then mistreat them as a result of their insecurity.

- “[...][the reason that *nice guys* are cheated on is] not just the nice thing, it’s also the choice of the person [partner].”
- “He [a *nice guy* that always gets cheated on]... chooses girls that are quite insecure... they tend to need affection from other people, they tend to need to be validated [by other men].”

The following section discusses participant **B**’s ideas about how the women’s age relates to the *Nice Guy Paradox*.

6.4.5 Women's age and the Nice Guy Paradox

Participant **B** claimed that the *Nice Guy Paradox* applies more strongly in relation to younger women, than it does in relation to older women. She supported this assertion by arguing that younger women tend to prioritise excitement over stability in their relationships, but that this tendency shifts as they get older and start wanting marriage and children.

- "...it [the *Nice Guy Paradox*] applies more at certain ages than other times... when you're younger, you look for more excitement than permanence... it doesn't matter if they're [men] not that stable..."
- "...when you're older... you want stability... someone that you could perhaps have children with and get married to... you more likely to go for a nicer guy than one that gives you thrills."

The following section discusses the trait of niceness in men.

6.4.6 Niceness is not an undesirable trait in men

Participant **B** said that the trait of niceness in isolation is not an undesirable trait in a man, but explained that other *nice guy* characteristics are undesirable.

- "...I couldn't go out with a guy that I don't think is nice... I need them [men] to have certain qualities that I admire and I like."
- "...niceness [in a man] isn't a problem...[it becomes problematic when men are] too nice or when they are so nice that they put people so far in front of themselves and they don't stand up for themselves and say what they actually feel and just give in all the time."

The following section brings together the meaning units from participant **B**'s interview in order to describe the essential structure of her experience of the *Nice Guy Paradox*.

6.5 A synthesis of meaning units from participant B's interview

The essential structure of participant **B**'s experience of the *Nice Guy Paradox* seems to be the following:

The *nice guys* referred to by the *Nice Guy Paradox* treat women well. In fact, they try extremely hard to please women in relationships and women are not required to take much responsibility for relationships with these men. *Nice guys* do not show women their true selves and try to be who they think women want them to be. These men are submissive in their relationships with women.

Nice guy characteristics are related to low self-esteem.

Nice guys finish last in the sense that women mistreat them in relationships and tend to retract from them romantically. Reasons for *nice guys* finishing last are numerous. Firstly, women are frustrated by men with *nice guy* characteristics. Secondly, men that exhibit *nice guy* characteristics make women feel scared and trapped in relationships. Thirdly, women are not challenged by *nice guys* and experience relationships with them as being uninteresting and unexciting. Fourthly, in relationships with *nice guys*, women feel guilty for not having reciprocal feelings for these men. Fifthly, *nice guys* often get mistreated by women because they are submissive and simply allow it to happen. Lastly, *nice guys* often choose insecure women who mistreat men as a result of their insecurity.

The *Nice Guy Paradox* applies more strongly to younger women than older women, because younger women prioritize excitement over stability.

Niceness in itself is a desirable trait in a man. However, the other *nice guy* characteristics are not desired by women.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced and given the researcher's impression of participant **B**. It has also provided a transcription and analysis of participant **B**'s interview. The analysis detailed in this chapter has yielded what the researcher believes to be the essential structure of participant **B**'s experience of the *Nice Guy Paradox*.

The following chapter introduces participant **C** and details the analysis of her interview.



CHAPTER 7

INTRA-INDIVIDUAL ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPANT C'S EXPERIENCE OF THE NICE GUY PARADOX

This chapter introduces participant **C** and provides some of her relevant biographical information. It also contains the researcher's impression of participant **C**, followed by a transcription of her interview. Finally, this chapter provides an analysis of participant **C**'s interview.

7.1 Introduction

At the time of the interview, participant **C** was 21 years old and was living on the premises of a school in Howick, Kwa-zulu Natal. She was working as a border mistress at the school, while also studying law. She is white and her first language is English.

Participant **C**'s parents got divorced when she was three years old and she has been in three significant romantic relationships in her life. She says that she has had some very good, as well as some very bad relationship experience. Participant **C** first became romantically involved when she was 15, with a family friend. She claims that the relationship was great to begin with, but then became complicated and deteriorated. Currently, participant **C** is in a one and a half year relationship. She describes this relationship as being very good and says that it has been her best relationship thus far. According to participant **C** her current boyfriend is nice, but is not a typical *nice guy*. Participant **C** has not dated any *nice guys*, but claims to have rejected a few of these men.

7.2 The researcher's impression of participant C

Participant **C** was casually dressed and well-groomed. She was friendly and seemed to be fairly confident. Her voice was loud and clear, and she spoke

quickly. She gave her opinions and views freely, and referred mainly to her own relationship experience. Participant **C** was expressive and sometimes animated. She made use of hand gestures regularly and placed great emphasis on certain words. She said that she had thought about the interview topic before the day of the interview, and responded to the question thoroughly. She appeared to be open and honest with regard to her views and experience.

7.3 Transcription of participant C's interview

Interviewer: Please describe honestly and in as much detail as possible, your experience of the nice guy paradox.

Participant C: (*laughs*) I actually have a theory about this. You know what I think? Like, firstly, like, with nice guys, like, I think that they generally, in general, don't have as much confidence as guys that aren't so nice. So I think that confidence is one of the most attractive things in a guy. So I think that when a guy's confident he attracts women and when he's not so confident then it's not as attractive to women. And then also, with nice guys like I think it becomes a power game. Like I think if a woman knows that a guy likes her, and she knows that she's got the guy and he's sending her flowers and telling her he loves her, like in the beginning, obviously when you're in a relationship those things become important but like in the beginning if he's all over her, then it puts her in a position of power. So she can say like yes I want you or no I don't want you and she has time to like consider it and think about it. And she knows he's there so he can be like a very convenient back up plan because you know he's there and you know he likes you (*hand gestures*) and you know... you know he's there. Whereas like with guys that are maybe not so nice, with your typical dog like character, he's the type of guy that looks at you and is like "I know I can have you, I know that you want me and if you don't want me there thirty girls behind you (*hand gestures*) that want me" so take me or don't have me but I don't actually care. And like that's attractive to women for some crazy reason like... And then also like, the decision's still yours whether you want to kiss the guy or not. Suddenly like you know if you don't kiss him you gonna lose him. He's gonna go to someone else so you can't rely on this whole back up plan. You got to go for it while it's there. And then, like ja, so you end up with guys that maybe aren't so nice. So that's kind of what I think about why nice guys finish last. 'Cos I just think if guys are too nice, and also like, it's irritating, when guys are too nice. If they come around and they sloppy and like, I think, some girls like that but I don't and I think girls like a guy who's like strong and in control. Who's masculine and occasionally on anniversaries and valentine's day you expect them to give you chocolates and flowers and stuff but if, if they too nice, it's not nice. I think it

becomes too sloppy and too sweet and it's not attractive. Like it's almost not masculine like, so I think, ja, I think...

Interviewer: What about niceness is not masculine? Just to try and understand it better...

Participant C: Well like, when you think of a guy, you don't think of him as somebody who runs around after you. You think of him as a strong (*hand gestures*) macho figure. Like, he's supposed to drink beer, go run around, play rugby and all those things. He's not supposed to do poetry and, but like, it is confusing. 'Cos if you hear like a romantic song on the radio like "Beautiful" by what's that guy's name?

Interviewer: James Blunt

Participant C: Ja, James Blunt. Like he's like, he's probably not a nice guy if you read the tabloids, but he's a nice guy. He sings a beautiful ode to his girlfriend and like just once that's nice but if it's every day it's sickening (*grimaces*). It's like, "This is not cool." Like ja, so I think you want the guy who's strong, you don't want a guy who's always running after you. You want to have to do some of the work. Like I think especially like as women become more like men and men become more like women, 'cos I think like we heading to a society where men are like doing their hair and doing their nails and having manicures and women are career hungry and they don't wanna have kids 'cos they want their careers, so I think like, they wanna do a little bit of work and they wanna do a bit of chasing. And if you know a guy's yours and you know he's wipped, then like you just get sick and bored of him. Like he doesn't keep you on your toes and I think...

Interviewer: So he becomes boring?

Participant C: Ja, I think so. Ja like [friend's name], who's [friend's sister's name]'s sister had a boyfriend who was wipped, like wipped. Like he was the nicest guy, he ran around after her, he did everything for her, and all that ended up happening, was she just, like she knew, she took advantage of it. I think like that's the thing, you take advantage of it 'cos you know if you do something wrong, they gonna be the one that apologises. So if you, whenever there's an argument you know they gonna come running back to you. So you can cause fights about stupid things and you can push your luck with them. Like I think, in all relationships the power balance has to be equal and when someone is too nice, the power balance shifts onto the female's side, and then like, there's not an equal power balance so, like the... And women don't like that I think women, it's like Biblical, women need to be, like there needs to be a power balance of fifty one forty nine and fifty one percent needs to go to the guy and he needs to make the final decision in anything that happens. But ja...

Interviewer: And you talked a bit about confidence, how do you relate confidence to niceness, just, how do you think about it?

Participant C: I think like, I think it's sad but I think most confident people almost aren't nice. 'Cos I think to be confident I think you gotta be quite full of yourself, and you've got to think a fair deal about yourself to be confident enough to walk up to a woman and pursue her in the way that she wants to be pursued. And like, ja so, and often somebody who's, who's that confident isn't nice because he's thinking about himself not about his girlfriend. He's thinking about like, 'cos he's, ja he, it's almost like he knows he's cool, he knows he's a catch, he knows that you're almost lucky to be with him so he doesn't have to put in the effort that a nice guy has to put in. So he's prob.. he's not as nice 'cos he doesn't have to be 'cos he knows that the girls are keen for him. Like a nice guy's almost like he's, almost trying to make the girl like him, not by who he is but by doing random things of affection that are, like stereotypical of, not actually... it's like, well you, it's making too much of an effort. I think that's the nice guys' problem, I think they put too much, they try too hard (*hand gestures*) so, and it doesn't feel right. Like they just try too hard, ja, I think if a nice guy relaxed more then I think it would be better. But I do think like, as women grow older that changes, 'cos I think when women are younger, they go for guys that are more confident and they go for like, your dog type guys who probably cheat on you and mess you around. But I think as you go through those guys, and you learn that you just get screwed over every time and they are a little bit self obsessed and all of this kind of stuff, then as you get older, then I think the nice guy suddenly becomes a better option because then you getting old and you looking for marriage and I think when women look for marriage, I think they do look for nice guys. Because then they do want that security and they do want someone who they know is gonna make an effort, who when they've got pms is going to say sorry and I love you and get you chocolate. So like I think, as you get older, you see it in lots of guys, the guys who at school were not so confident and were like your nice guys. At school, they weren't popular at all, they couldn't get any women, and then as you grow up and as you get into like your thirties, late twenties, and women are starting to look for husbands, suddenly those guys who couldn't pull anyone have women falling all over them and the guys at school who were like these big jocks and players suddenly can't get women. Like they gotta go for women who are younger than them 'cos the women that are their ages, they don't want them anymore. They don't want the beer drinking, partying, going out and being a rogue. They want someone who'll look after them because their ideals have changed as they've got older. So I think being a nice guy pays off at the end, when looking for a wife, and not so much at school and at varsity and at clubs...

Interviewer: So would you say at school, varsity and clubs, nice guys do come last?

Participant C: Yes, I would say that. Like I think, ja, I think if you had a really nice guy that had the amount of confidence that a dog had, I think you would have a winning combination. I

think if a nice guy could come up to you and hold a decent conversation and flirt with you like, properly, not like too softly, if he flirted with you like, he made your heart beat a little bit (*smiles*), then like I think it would work. But most guys, nice guys, the reason why they're nice is 'cos they don't have that confidence so... But I think ja, clubs, varsity, high school they do finish last and then later on I think they come through and finish first at the end 'cos they do get wives who they look after and probably end up having more satisfying relationships than other chaps who probably cheat on their wives and run around and do all sorts of terrible horrible things...

Interviewer: And what about your experience?

Participant C: My experience? I think the first guy I dated, ja he was, he was probably a bit of a mixture. He was a really nice guy, but he was also seriously confident and I think like, it was a problem because he knew he was good looking and he knew there were always other options. So he kind of kept his options open and I didn't realize until much later in the relationship that he was doing that. But I mean, he never cheated on me but there were emails and that kind of, stuff like that, but I think like, he was a nice guy, he was good and decent and honest, but I think he definitely had a character of dog about him and I think what attracted me to him was probably not his niceness. It was probably the other stuff. He was very confident and he was an entertainer, he was an auctioneer, so he knew how to hold a crowd and he knew how to speak eloquently and he was much older than me, so he knew how to flirt with girls and how to romance them and woo them. So I think, although he was nice, he had a lot of, I dunno what's the opposite of a nice guy? (*laughs*) I dunno he probably had the qualities of a dog in him as well. He enjoyed flirting with other women. I think lots of confidence was connected to women flirting with him and being attracted to him so once I was his like, he was still looking around for that satisfaction from other people. And then, once we lived together, then it just went all pear-shaped. Then the nice guy went away, and he was under a huge amount of pressure and I think the pressure cracked him but he became a dog. Like he was horrible to me, but also I think like, I suffocated him, I was just so in love with him. Like, I was the nice girl. Like he knew whatever he did to me I would come running back to him and he knew how badly he treated me, so in that case I finished last. The second guy was definitely not a nice guy. He was terrible! He was the type of guy who just like... He knew, like the reason he went after me was because I was like one of the only girls that just wasn't attracted to him. He had women rushing after him and I just thought he was an arrogant asshole, and because I thought that, he thought I was attractive because he was used to having girls just fall for him. So he pursued me in a big way and when I got together with him he was just... But it was nice like, sometimes the asshole's nice because, the nice guy, like when you give a guy shit, you want him to say [participant C's name] you talking shit, you're being stupid, like stop it just get over it. Whereas if you're with someone who's so into you, you end up having arguments about things you shouldn't argue about because they just

being too nice about it. They like “Ok, I accept that I’m doing this wrong and I’m doing that wrong.” And he, he was the kind of person, he was so confident, he thought he was perfect. Like he honestly did, he didn’t think there was anything wrong with him, and I’d tell him. Like I think he had OCD. Like he was obsessive-compulsive like you’ve never met anyone as obsessive compulsive and I used to talk to him about it. I used to say to him like [participant C’s ex-boyfriend’s name] it’s ridiculous, it’s ridiculous to... Like he used to take his clothes out in the same order every morning and the one day he put his underwear in his left shoe and his socks in his right shoe, and the one day I switched them around and he came back and he looked at these shoes, and then he like switched them, and he looked at them again, and he switched them back, switched his underwear and his socks around, and said “did you just switch my underwear and my socks around?” And he took off at me. Like we had a huge fight about it like ‘cos I’d switched his underwear and his socks around. And I was like [participant C’s ex-boyfriend’s name], I’m just proving to you that you are like obsessive compulsive, if your underwear and your socks are not in the right shoe, you like, you can’t function. And he was just like, no well, that’s what allows me to be successful, and that’s what allows me to be so organised and get so much done. And then like I took it, but he was a real asshole. We got engaged and in our prenuptial contract we had my thigh measurements and if I put on five centimetres in my thighs that was grounds for divorce. Like if we got divorced I wouldn’t get as much money as if we didn’t get divorced, so...

Interviewer: So how did you feel about that? Was that a good or a bad thing?

Participant C: I think with him it was like a worm on a hook syndrome. Like when I met him, he put on this front to me because he wanted me and because I didn’t want him. So he was like, he was amazing when we first got together. He put in a huge amount of effort and flew me around the country and did this that and the next thing. And then once I’d bitten into the worm, then I got a hook in my mouth because then I really started liking the guy. And then after that it was weird, it became like an addiction almost. Like because he was so hard to please and because you couldn’t make him happy, when you did make him happy you felt good about yourself. And you just expected it, because he was very successful, he was like a South African swimmer, he was very wealthy, he’d made millions, and so, because he was so much and I was like a student. I dunno, I kind of felt like he had the right to say those things to me. And I dunno he had his excuses. He was just like, “No because, because I’ve got money, women want to marry me because I’ve got money so then I don’t want to end up with a wife who makes a... ‘cos most women make a huge effort up until the point they get married, and then once they get married they know they’ve got the guy so they just let themselves go,” and he says like, “I don’t want that to happen, it’s just like a safe net to make sure it doesn’t happen. I’m always gonna make an effort with my body and make sure I’m in shape and I think you should do the same and that’s one of the prerequisites of marrying you, so...” And now it sounds crazy. If I think back on it now I think I was mad to stay in that relationship, but

then it was, ja like I, I dunno, I loved him and he was amazing and he was, he was an amazing guy. And I dunno, I put up with it, I accepted that there were going to be some things about him that were going to be a bit... he had high standards (*excited*). That's the thing, he had high standards, so like, he had a very high standard that he wanted me to attain. And if I didn't attain that standard it wasn't good, like he came down on me hard. But if I did attain that standard then like I was kind of worthy to be with him...

Interviewer: Interesting, and any nice guys along the way?

Participant C: [Participant C's boyfriend's name], my current boyfriend's a very nice guy. Although... ja he is, to me he is. I think to other girls he wasn't so nice (*smiles*) but to me and, I dunno I think, like, how we got together is this other chap [participant C's ex-boyfriend's name] broke up with me in hospital on my birthday. And then [participant C's boyfriend's name] and I had been friends and we'd hooked up once or twice in gaps in my relationship with [participant C's ex-boyfriend's name], [participant C's ex-boyfriend's name] and I had a very on off relationship. And I called him, he called me on my birthday to say happy birthday and [participant C's ex-boyfriend's name] had just broken up with me. And he said "hello, how was your birthday?" and I went "what am I gonna do!" (*pretend crying*) and he said, "Drive down and I'll look after you and ja, like, come down to Natal, spend a couple of weeks with me and I'll look after you and make sure everything's cool." So I went down and he looked after me and it was cool. So and he is nice, like if, I mean he's still, he's confident like he's got the sex appeal of a dog but he's still nice. And if he does something wrong he apologises. Ja he's a nice mixture, but I've never dated anyone who's like nice nice. Who runs around after me...

Interviewer: Have you rejected anyone like that?

Participant C: Ja, a couple, ja and... let me think about this now. I think.... there were a couple of guys in high school and I think the reason why I rejected them was because they were kind of like a step down the social ladder. Like although they were really nice guys and I got on very well with them, they were, like in high school there's like a hierarchy. If you're a certain calibre of girl you need to date someone in your group or above. And he, like the nice guys tended not to be in those groups so... I mean it was a stupid thing. I mean now it sounds very materialistic but like it was just, he wasn't, I knew if I dated him people would be like "what?" So I rejected a couple of those. And then, I often had friends who were really nice and wanted to be more but I just wasn't attracted to them...

Interviewer: Do you think that that has anything to do with their niceness?

Participant C: I think part of it was. I think it was the whole back up plan thing. Like I knew they were there and I knew they liked me. So I almost didn't have to get together with them 'cos I knew that they were there. So like, and I think when you're young especially, that kind of, half the attraction to someone is winning them and them winning you and it's like a whole... (*hand gestures*) I mean that's what the whole courtship stage is about. With nice guys there's no courtship stage 'cos they just... from day one they just like you and want to be with you and they'll put up with your shit, put up with whatever you do because they like you and they want to be with you. And I think like, (*laughs*) that doesn't do it for me for some reason. And also I think before maybe [participant C's boyfriend's name], I've never met a guy who's nice and who's got the confidence, and who's got enough of an authority about him like he... Nice guys tend to be like a little bit of a... you can stand on them and I think that's a problem. I don't think any girl wants to be with a guy who they've got wrapped around your pinkie, or they can walk all over. And I think like I never met a really nice guy who wouldn't just let me walk all over him...

Interviewer: And why do you think a girl wouldn't want to be with a guy who she can walk over, how does that sort of make her feel?

Participant C: Like I said I think it's a Biblical thing. Like a woman wants to know that the man's in control and the man's taken authority of the relationship, of situations. And I think women, ja they want a strong man who... who, ja I think, ja I don't think... (*confused facial expression*) 'Cos if you control the relationship, I don't think it's a natural position for a woman to be in. Like when you're making decisions, I think that a woman and a man should talk about it together, but I think that the man should take the final decision. And that's what's so wonderful about being a woman. They make the final decisions and if it goes wrong then it's on their head not yours (*laughs*). And I don't think any woman wants to be in a relationship where the responsibility is on them 'cos I don't think we biologically built to do that. I think we, I think ja, it's the man's responsibility. When it comes to buying a house I think the man should decide where you buy the house. And the woman's just as responsible for making research decisions about where the market's going and if it's a good house and this that and the next thing but I think it's ultimately the man who decides and then who takes responsibility for the decision and who leads the family. I think no woman wants to lead a relationship. You want to be the one who is lead and you want someone who is going to lead competently. And I think most nice guys come across as not being someone who can competently lead a relationship. But then like I think, it's a young thing. I think a young nice guy's like that. I think as guys get older they grow into themselves. I think guys go through a big change when they about twenty five, twenty six and they kind of become comfortable with themselves, comfortable with their bodies and comfortable with who they are. And then I think they like start stepping up to the plate a little bit more and they can be nice but still have more

authority, which is why I think women go for older nice guys as opposed to younger nice guys...

Interviewer: So that more push-over sort of guy, am I right in saying that women get the idea that now, because he's a bit of a pushover, they have to take control and they don't like that?

Participant C: Ja, no exactly right. Because he's not gonna make decisions, it's like "What do you want to do? No what do you want to do? I want to do what you want to do." (*whiny voice*) Like that's not what you want. You want someone who says "Ok, what do you want to do, I feel like going for dinner." And like I think, you always should be included in the decision, but it's up to them to make the decision. You don't want someone who is so worried about what you want that they can't ever make decisions for themselves...

Interviewer: Ja, any other thoughts on the issue?

Participant C: Ja, I think, if nice guys, especially when they were younger 'cos I think it happens naturally when they're older, but I think, if nice guys were a little bit more comfortable with themselves, and a little bit more confident, and a little bit more cheeky, they wouldn't have any issues. And I think they'd be wonderful boyfriends, but they must just learn to be a little bit more confident and a little bit more authoritative without losing their personality traits that make them nice guys...

Interviewer: It sounds like there are not many guys that are confident that are also nice. Just from what you're saying, is that true?

Participant C: I think in my experience, younger guys, yes... 'Cos I think that the confident guy is normally a guy who's good looking, or not even good looking, but he plays... High school, lets talk about high school. He plays sport, he's good at sport and because, because he gets all the attention I think that that affects him and he becomes a little bit full of himself and that stops him from being a nice guy. And so, ja, whereas the nicer guys are the guys that are a little bit less assuming and they're not as popular so that, like the way that they make friends is just based on their personality. And I think, ja, so they don't have the confidence because they don't have the kind of attention that the other chaps get. And I think that if you gave a nice guy attention he probably wouldn't be a nice guy anymore. I think if you put a guy that was a really nice guy into a situation and you put a whole lot of girls and said ok listen go for him and fight over him and all the guys made him a bit of a hero at school, I don't think that he would become a nice guy anymore. I think that the attention would get to him and he would become a bit egocentric. So I think that like, a nice guy's almost a situational thing. Like you kind of get put in a situation where you become a nice guy because you don't have that confidence and that ego that goes along with it...

Interviewer: It sounds almost like you're saying that you can't have confidence and ego and be nice? Because you're sort of saying that your confidence and your ego make you not nice?

Participant C: I think you can. I think there are some guys that do. But I think like especially when guys are younger, like as soon as they get given attention, as soon as they get put in a situation where people are paying them too much attention then they do lose that niceness. Because they almost don't need it anymore, 'cos they've got people coming after them. So ja, I think especially when they young. I think it doesn't happen when you get older. Twenty five twenty six it's not an issue any more. But when you're younger I think it is hard because as soon as you have confidence and ego it puts you in a different category, well if we looking at the nice guy stereotype. I think there are lots of nice guys, or guys who are confident, or who have a good command of themselves (*hand gestures*), who are also nice people. And if you needed someone to help you they would help but I think, it's not lots of guys, there some guys who have both, but I think most of the time it's either one or the other. And I think the guys that are confident aren't necessarily not nice guys. They just, you wouldn't call him a nice guy. You would call him a cool guy, or a decent chap or a good oke, but you wouldn't call them a nice guy...

Interviewer: Ok so the nice guy... what is he, actually?

Participant C: He's kind of like... the nice guy is like... a little bit quiet. He's very compliant, he's there at two o'clock in the morning when you phone him in tears because the not so nice guy has broken up with you. He makes it very clear that he likes you and that he wants to be with you, but he never actually does anything serious about it. He just kind of puts it there without making any serious moves. And ja, he's the guy who, I dunno, walks you home, drives you home, helps you out, I think often gets abused. I think that women often take advantage of the nice guy like they end up asking them to do... He's the guy that will do things that the not so nice guys won't do. You know that if you ask him a favour even if it's a stupid favour that he should say no to, he'll still do it. Like I think, they make great friends, most of the time, so nice guys are good friends.

Interviewer: Cool, ja you've given me a lot of good info. Do you have anything else or is that...

Participant C: I think that's about it.

Interviewer: Ok well thanks a lot.

Participant C: Pleasure.

7.4 Analysis and discussion of participant C's experience

The analysis of participant C's interview was done according to the phenomenological framework outlined by Giorgi (1997). After carefully reading the transcription, it was possible to start dividing participant C's interview into parts based on meaning discrimination. Thus, distinct meaning units were discriminated and re-described in psychological language. These meaning units are discussed in the sections that follow.

7.4.1 Characteristics of nice guys according to participant C

Participant C described the *nice guys* referred to by the *Nice Guy Paradox* with respect to the following characteristics:

7.4.1.1 Primarily, nice guys lack confidence

Participant C claimed that *nice guys'* primary characteristic is a lack of confidence.

- "...[*nice guys*] don't have as much confidence as guys that aren't so nice."

She explained that some men receive less positive attention than other men while growing up and suggested that these men develop less confidence than other men. According to participant C, these men become *nice guys*, as opposed to confident, somewhat less-nice men.

- "...a guy who's good looking, or... [is] good at sport... gets all the attention... and he becomes a bit full of himself and that stops him from being a nice guy... nicer guys are... not as popular... they don't have the confidence because they don't have the kind of attention that the other chaps get... if you gave a nice guy attention he probably wouldn't be a nice guy anymore."

Participant **C** seemed to imply that other *nice guy* traits and tendencies stem from this fundamental characteristic.

- "...the reason why they're nice [*nice guys*] is 'cos they don't have that confidence..."
- "...you become a *nice guy* because you don't have that confidence and that ego that goes along with it..."

These traits and tendencies are discussed below.

7.4.1.2 Nice guys try extremely hard to please women

According to participant **C**, *nice guys* are very sweet and romantic, and go to great lengths to please the women that they desire.

- "...he [the *nice guy*] walks you [the woman] home, drives you home, helps you out."
- "...[the *nice guy* is] sending her [the woman] flowers and telling her that he loves her..."
- "...[the *nice guy*] is there at two o'clock in the morning when you [the woman] phone him in tears because the not so nice guy has broken up with you."

In fact, she feels that they go too far in this respect.

- "[The *nice guy*] will do things that the not so nice guys won't do...even if it's a stupid favour that he should say no to, he'll still do it."
- "[*Nice guys*] try too hard..."

7.4.1.3 Nice guys are submissive men

Participant **C** explained that *nice guys* are submissive men that do not stand up for themselves in relationships.

- "...you [the woman] can stand on them [*nice guys*]..."
- "...I never met a really nice guy who wouldn't just let me walk all over him..."

7.4.1.4 Nice guys lack authority

Participant **C** claimed that *nice guys* tend to be quiet and compliant, and do not possess an air of authority.

- "...the nice guy is like... a little bit quiet. He's very compliant..."
- "...I've never met a nice guy... who's got enough of an authority about him..."

7.4.1.5 Nice guys are available but passive in their approach to women

According to participant **C**, *nice guys* make themselves available to the women that they desire, but their approach is very passive and not at all aggressive.

- "...you [the woman] know he's [the *nice guy*] there and you know he likes you..."
- "He [the *nice guy*] makes it very clear that he likes you [the woman] and that he wants to be with you, but he never actually does anything serious about it. He just kind of puts it there without making any serious moves."

The following section discusses when *nice guys* finish last.

7.4.2 Nice guys finish last when they are young

Participant **C** claimed that *nice guys* do finish last with women when they are relatively young.

- "...[at] clubs, varsity, [and] high school they [*nice guys*] do finish last..."
- "...being a *nice guy* pays off at the end... [but] not so much at school and at varsity and at clubs..."

The following sections discuss how *nice guys* finish last when they are young.

7.4.3 Participant C's experience of how nice guys finish last

According to participant **C**, *nice guys* finish last in the following ways.

7.4.3.1 Participant C has rejected nice guys

Participant **C** said that she had never dated a *nice guy*, but that she had rejected a few of these men.

- "...I've never dated anyone who's like nice nice. Who runs around after me..."
- "...I rejected a couple of those [*nice guys*]."
- "...I often had friends that were really nice and wanted to be more but I just wasn't attracted to them..."

7.4.3.2 Women take advantage of nice guys

Participant **C** explained that when *nice guys* do get into relationships, the women involved take advantage of them.

- "...he's [*nice guy*] the guy who, I dunno, walks you home, drives you home, helps you out, I think often gets abused."
- "...women often take advantage of the *nice guy*..."

She claimed that this is due to the characteristically submissive way in which these men relate to women.

- "...you know if you do something wrong, they [*nice guys*] gonna be the one that apologises. So... whenever there's an argument you know they gonna come running back to you. So you can cause fights about stupid things and you can push your luck with them."

According to participant **C**, *nice guys* are rejected and taken advantage of by women when they are young. The above section discusses why they are taken advantage of in relationships. The following section discusses why they are rejected by the women that they desire.

7.4.4 Participant C's experience of why nice guys are rejected by women

Participant **C** gave various reasons for *nice guys* being rejected by women when they are relatively young. These reasons are explicated in the sections that follow.

7.4.4.1 Women are attracted to confidence

Participant **C** explained that in general, women are attracted to confidence, which *nice guys* lack (see 7.4.1.1).

- "...I think that confidence is one of the most attractive things in a guy."
- "...when a guy's confident he attracts women and when he's not so confident then it's not as attractive to women."

7.4.4.2 Nice guy characteristics are not masculine

According to participant **C**, *nice guy* characteristics are not masculine. She argued that women are attracted to men with stronger, more in control, more macho characteristics.

- "...if they [guys] too nice, it's not nice.... Like it's almost not masculine..."
- "...girls like a guy who's like strong and in control."
- "...when you think of a guy, you don't think of him as somebody who runs around after you. You think of him as a strong (hand gestures) macho figure."

7.4.4.3 Nice guy characteristics irritate women

Participant **C** explained that apart from not being masculine, *nice guy* characteristics actually irritate women.

- "...it's irritating, when guys are too nice... it becomes too sloppy and too sweet and it's not attractive."
- "...[James Blunt] sings a beautiful ode to his girlfriend and like just once that's nice but if it's everyday it's sickening (grimaces)."

7.4.4.4 Nice guys do not appear to be capable of leading relationships

According to participant **C**, women want to be lead in relationships and *nice guys* do not appear to be capable of doing this competently.

- "...no woman wants to lead a relationship. You [women] want to be the one who is lead and you want someone who is going to lead competently."
- "...the woman wants to know that the man's in control and the man's taken authority of the relationship... Like when you're making decisions, I think a woman and a man should talk about it together, but I think the man should take the final decision."
- "...most *nice guys* come across as not being someone who can competently lead a relationship."

7.4.4.5 Relationships with nice guys do not include a courtship stage

Participant **C** explained that with *nice guys*, there is no courtship stage in the relationship.

- "With nice guys there's no courtship stage... from day one they just like you and want to be with you and they'll put up with your shit..."

She argued that a relationship with no courtship stage is not attractive, challenging or exciting.

- "...half the attraction to someone is winning them and them winning you... I mean that's what the whole courtship stage is about."
- "You [women] want to have to do some of the work...they [women] wanna do a bit of chasing... if you know a guy's yours and you know he's wipped, then like you just get sick and bored of him. Like he doesn't keep you on your toes..."

7.4.4.6 There is no urgency to start relationships with nice guys

Participant **C** explained that because *nice guys* make themselves obviously available to women indefinitely, there is no urgency to start relationships with them. As a result, the *nice guy* often becomes a women's last option.

- "...if a woman knows that a guy likes her, and she knows that she's got the guy and he's sending her flowers and telling her he loves her, like in the beginning... it puts her in a position of power... she has time to consider it and think about it... she knows he's there so he can be like a very convenient back up plan..."
- "...I knew they [*nice guys*] were there and I knew they liked me. So I almost didn't have to get together with them..."

7.4.4.7 Nice guys hold less social status than other guys

According to participant **C**, *nice guys* tend to hold less social status than other guys at school.

- "...they [*nice guys*] were kind of like a step down the social ladder... in high school there's like a hierarchy... you need to date someone in your group or above... nice guys tended not to be in those groups..."
- "I knew if I dated him [*a nice guy*] people would be like "what?" So I rejected a couple of those [*nice guys*]."

The above sections discuss the reasons for *nice guys* being rejected by women when they are young. The following section discusses the impact of age on this phenomenon.

7.4.5 The impact of aging on the Nice Guy Paradox

Participant **C** explained that age undermines the *Nice Guy Paradox* in two ways. Firstly, she argued that as *nice guys* grow older, they start becoming more confident and stop exhibiting unattractive *nice guy* characteristics.

- "...as [*nice*] guys grow older they grow into themselves...[they become] comfortable with their bodies and comfortable with who they are...they like start stepping up to the plate a little bit more and they can be nice but still have more authority, which is why I think women go for older nice guys as opposed to younger nice guys..."

Secondly she argued that as women grow older, they start looking for security and tend to choose different types of men to the men that they choose when they are young.

- "...I think when women look for marriage, I think they do look for nice guys. Because then they do want that security and they do want someone who they know is gonna make an effort..."
- "They [older women] don't want the beer drinking, partying, going out and being a rogue. They want someone who'll look after them because their ideals have changed as they've got older."

For these reasons, participant **C** claimed that *nice guys* do end up getting wives and having satisfying relationships.

- "...[nice] guys who couldn't pull anyone [when they were young] have women falling all over them [later on]..."
- "...they [nice guys] do get wives who they look after and probably end up having more satisfying relationships than other chaps [later in life]..."

The following section discusses the trait of niceness in men.

7.4.6 Niceness is not an undesirable trait in men

According to participant **C**, the trait of niceness is not an undesirable trait in a man. She emphasizes that low confidence is the *nice guy's* primary problem.

- "...if you had a really nice guy that had the amount of confidence that a dog [less nice man] had... you would have a winning combination."
- "...if nice guys were... a little bit more confident... they'd be wonderful boyfriends..."

The following section brings together the meaning units from participant **C's** interview in order to describe the essential structure of her experience of the *Nice Guy Paradox*.

7.5 A synthesis of meaning units from participant B's interview

The essential structure of participant **C's** experience of the *Nice Guy Paradox* seems to be the following:

Primarily, the *nice guys* referred to by the *Nice Guy Paradox* lack confidence. As a result these men are super-nice to women and actually try too hard in relationships. In addition, due to their low confidence levels, these men are submissive and passive in relation to women, and do not possess an air of authority.

Men that do not receive much positive attention while growing up develop less confidence than other men and become *nice guys* as opposed to confident, somewhat less-nice men.

When they are relatively young, *nice guys* get rejected and taken advantage of by women. These men get taken advantage of because of the characteristically submissive way in which they relate to women. They are rejected for various reasons. Firstly, women are attracted to confidence, which *nice guys* lack. Secondly, women are attracted to masculinity and *nice guy* characteristics are not masculine. Thirdly, *nice guy* characteristics actually irritate women. Fourthly, women want to be lead in relationships and *nice guys* do not appear to be capable of leading competently. Fifthly, relationships with *nice guys* do not include a courtship stage, which makes them less attractive, challenging and exciting than other relationships. Sixthly, because *nice guys* make themselves available to women indefinitely, women feel no urgency to start relationships with them and they often become last options. Seventhly, at school, *nice guys* tend to hold less status than other men.

As they get older, *nice guys* get more confident. Around the same time, women start looking for marriage and their ideals start changing. Consequently, *nice guys* do end up getting wives and having satisfying relationships.

Women do not find the trait of niceness undesirable. If *nice guys* possessed more confidence, they would be attractive to women.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced and given the researcher's impression of participant **C**. It has also provided a transcription and analysis of participant **C**'s interview. The analysis detailed in this chapter has yielded what the researcher believes to be the essential structure of participant **C**'s experience of the *Nice Guy Paradox*.

The following chapter provides an inter-individual analysis of participant **A**, **B** and **C**'s interviews.



CHAPTER 8

INTER-INDIVIDUAL DISCUSSION AND INTEGRATION OF RESULTS

In chapters 5, 6 and 7, the meaning units that emerged from each interview were synthesized individually in order to derive the essential structures of each participant's experience of the *Nice Guy Paradox*. In the present chapter, the meaning units from all three interviews are integrated into central themes, which are discussed with reference to literature presented in Chapter 2. The participants' experiences of the *Nice Guy Paradox* are then discussed within the framework of phenomenology and its concepts. Finally, the central themes outlined in this chapter are synthesized in order to provide the essential structure of the participants' experiences of the *Nice Guy Paradox*.

8.1 Introduction

The intra-individual experiences detailed in the preceding chapters do differ to some extent. This variation is unsurprising, since each participant exists within a distinct context. In other words, the participants' individual personalities, histories and circumstances all contribute to their differing experiences of the *Nice Guy Paradox*. These experiences reflect the respective *Umwelts*, *Mitwelts* and *Eigenwelts* of the three participants. Including intra-individual analyses provides access to the richness of the phenomenon under investigation, thereby allowing for a fuller more detailed understanding thereof.

Having said this, there is a high degree of commonality with respect to the participants' experiences of the *Nice Guy Paradox*. This fact may be explained in part by certain inter-individual similarities. However, this commonality could also be argued to be reflective of the essential, underlying structure of the social phenomenon that is commonly known as the *Nice Guy Paradox*. Phenomenological data analysis seeks to discover this structure.

Thus, while certain inter-individual differences of experience are addressed in this chapter, the discussion that follows is focused mainly on inter-individual similarities.

8.2 Central themes in the phenomenon of the Nice Guy Paradox

The following sections discuss only those themes that are common to all three, or at least two of the participants. Ways in which these themes relate back to literature presented in Chapter 2 are included in this discussion. Where a theme is only shared by two participants, some indication of the other participant's position with regard to this theme is provided.

The first major theme is concerned with the characteristics of the *nice guys* referred to by the *Nice Guy Paradox*. The second major theme discusses the ways in which these men finish last with women. The third major theme considers the reasons for *nice guys* finishing last. The fourth major theme discusses age in relation to the *Nice Guy Paradox*. The fifth major theme is concerned with the trait of niceness in men, and how this trait relates to the *Nice Guy Paradox*.

8.2.1 Characteristics of nice guys

All three participants characterized the *nice guys* referred to by the *Nice Guy Paradox* based on their experiences of these men. Three dominant themes emerged. These themes are discussed below.

8.2.1.1 Nice guys try hard to please women

According to all three participants, *nice guys* try hard to please women. In fact, participant **A** expressed the view that *nice guys* do not only try hard to please women, but actually attempt to please people in general. Both participant **B** and participant **C** explained that *nice guys* treat women very well, but actually go too far in this respect, and try too hard to please them.

This theme may help to explain why women often perceive *nice guys* as being polite, moral, committed, caring and respectful (Herold & Milhausen, 1999). It might also contribute to an understanding of the perceptions of *nice guys* held by researchers that have investigated the *Nice Guy Paradox*. For instance, the designs of studies performed by Herold and Milhausen (1999), Urbaniak and Kilmann (2003 & 2006), and Jensen-Campbell, Graziano and West (1995), reflect perceptions that *nice guys* are characterised by traits such as niceness, kindness, sensitivity, expressiveness, agreeableness and prosocial orientation. In other words, *nice guys* may be perceived as being polite, moral, committed, caring, respectful, nice, kind, sensitive, expressive, agreeable and prosocially orientated because they try hard to please other people (especially women).

8.2.1.2 Nice guys are submissive

The participants all expressed the idea that *nice guys* are submissive men that do not stand up for themselves in relationships. Participant **A** elaborated that these men are not perceived as dominant males and participant **B** added that even on a very literal, concrete level, *nice guys* submit to women's leadership.

This theme may have some relation to women perceiving *nice guys* as being weak (Herold & Milhausen, 1999). In addition, it might help to explain the perception that *nice guys* are essentially agreeable, which is reflected in the design of a study performed by Urbaniak and Kilmann (2006).

This theme might also contribute to an understanding of women perceiving *nice guys* as being polite and respectful (Herold & Milhausen, 1999). Similarly, the perceptions that *nice guys* are nice, kind, sensitive, expressive and prosocially orientated, as reflected in the designs of studies performed by Herold and Milhausen (1999), Urbaniak and Kilmann (2003), and Jensen-Campbell, Graziano and West (1995), may be explained in part by this theme. To elaborate, *nice guys* may be perceived as being polite, respectful, nice, kind, sensitive, expressive and prosocially orientated, not only because they

try hard to please other people (and women in particular), but also because they are submissive and tend to avoid confrontation.

8.2.1.3 Nice guys have low levels of confidence

In one way or another, all three participants characterized *nice guys* as men with low levels of confidence. Participant **A** explained that *nice guys* do not confidently assert themselves and tend to be shy. Participant **B** and participant **C** both seemed to express the idea that low confidence or self esteem is the fundamental characteristic underlying other *nice guy* characteristics.

This theme supports qualitative research performed by Herold and Milhausen (1999). Results of this research indicate that women perceive *nice guys* as being less confident than other men. This theme does not feature strongly in other studies that have focused directly on the *Nice Guy Paradox*. However, the design of the quantitative part of the study performed by Herold and Milhausen (1999) reflects the perception that *nice guys* are shy men. *Nice guys'* low levels of confidence may help to explain why the researchers would hold such a perception.

The sections below are concerned with the ways in which *nice guys* finish last with women.

8.2.2 Nice guys finish last

The participants explained that *nice guys* finish last in two ways. These are discussed in the following sections.

8.2.2.1 Nice guys are mistreated by women

All the participants claimed that *nice guys* are often mistreated by women in relationships. Participant **A** and participant **C** explained that women take advantage of *nice guys*.

None of the research discussed in Chapter 2 relates directly to this theme.

8.2.2.2 Nice guys are rejected by women

The three participants all expressed the view that *nice guys* are rejected by women. Participant **A** spoke about women in general. Participant **C** referred to her own rejection of *nice guys*. Participant **B** explained that women generally try to avoid/get out of relationships with *nice guys*.

This theme is compatible with research that has focused on the real-life experiences of men (Bogaert & Fisher, 1995; Trapnel & Meston, 1996; Urbaniak & Kilmann, 2006). The results of such research suggest that modest, agreeable, unselfish men are less successful than other men when it comes to attracting women. In addition, this theme might help to explain why 56% of women interviewed by Herold and Milhausen (1999) said that they knew of other women that had chosen the not-so-nice guy over the *nice guy* and that *nice guys* are unlikely to have as many sexual partners as guys that are less-nice.

The sections that follow discuss reasons for *nice guys* finishing last with women.

8.2.3 Reasons for nice guys finishing last

The participants provided numerous reasons for *nice guys* finishing last. The following reasons emerged most strongly.

8.2.3.1 Nice guys allow women to mistreat them

The participants all expressed the view that *nice guys* get mistreated by women because of their submissive tendencies. In other words, because *nice guys* do not stand up for themselves, they allow themselves to be mistreated and exploited by women.

This theme relates to the *nice guy* characteristic of submissiveness, which has already been discussed in relation to literature presented in Chapter 2.

8.2.3.2 Relationships with nice guys are not challenging and exciting

According to all three participants, relationships with *nice guys* are not challenging and exciting. Participant **A** explained this is as being the result of an unequal power balance (in favour of the women involved). Participant **C** explained this as being the result of these relationships having no courtship stage. According to participant **C**, because *nice guys* are affectionate and committed from the beginning, women are not required to court/win them.

This theme supports other research demonstrating that women perceive *nice guys* as being less exciting than other men (Herold & Milhausen, 1999). It may also help to explain one of Herold and Milhausen's (1999) perceptions about *nice guys*. The design of the quantitative part of their study reflects the perception that *nice guys* are less fun than other men.

This theme also relates to some of the theoretical literature in Chapter 2. For instance, when applied to the *Nice Guy Paradox*, dissonance theory (Walster, Walster, Pliavin & Schmidt, 2003) suggests that *nice guys* are undervalued by women because they show affection, kindness and niceness too easily (there is no challenge involved in winning their affection). On the basis of this theory, it could be argued that women find relationships with *nice guys* less exciting than relationships with other men because they value *nice guys* less than other men.

On the basis of Livingston's (1980) theory, it seems possible that *nice guys* inspire less passion in women than other men, because they are more predictable and provoke less uncertainty in women, than other men. Such an argument might help to explain why women find relationships with *nice guys* less exciting than relationships with other men. In relation to this theme, it could also be argued that predictable relationships may be less exciting than

unpredictable relationships because they are less challenging than unpredictable relationships.

According to Sternberg's (1986) theory, love is made up of three components, namely, intimacy, passion and decision/commitment, which suggests that passion is a very important factor with respect to romantic relationships. This might to explain why *nice guys* often get rejected by women due to a lack of excitement.

8.2.3.3 Nice guy characteristics irritate and frustrate women

Both participant **B** and participant **C** explained that *nice guy* characteristics are irritating and frustrating to women. Participant **A** did not express this feeling during the interview.

None of the literature in Chapter 2 relates directly to this theme.

8.2.3.4 Women are attracted to certain characteristics, which nice guys lack

Both participant **A** and participant **C** mentioned characteristics that women find attractive, which *nice guys* lack. Participant **A** mentioned characteristics such as dominance, strength and physical attractiveness. Participant **C** mentioned characteristics such as confidence, strength, leadership and social status. Participant **B** did not elaborate on attractive characteristics that *nice guys* lack.

This theme does relate to some of the literature in Chapter 2. Many studies have demonstrated the importance of physical attractiveness in romantic relationships (Bogaert & Fisher, 1995; Fitness, Fletcher & Overall, 2007; Sprecher, 1989; Urbaniak and Kilmann, 2003; Weiderman & Dubois, 1998). Research has also shown that women are attracted to men with high levels of confidence, dominance and social status (Bogaert and Fisher, 1995; Botwin,

Buss & Shackelford, 1997; Buss & Schmitt, 1993), which seems to imply that perceived strength of character is attractive to women.

According to Herold and Milhausen (1999) women claim that *nice guys* are often less physically attractive than other men. In addition, the designs of quantitative studies performed by Herold and Milhausen (1999), as well as Urbaniak and Kilmann (2003 & 2006), seem to suggest that these researchers also hold this view. Research that associates *nice guys* with low levels of confidence has already been discussed.

The fact that Jensen-Campbell, Graziano and West (1995) decided to investigate the characteristic of male dominance as part of their study on the *Nice Guy Paradox*, seems to suggest that these researchers perceived some relation between this characteristic and the *Nice Guy Paradox*. In addition, research relating to the idea that *nice guys* are submissive as opposed to dominant has already been discussed. According to Herold and Milhausen (1999), *nice guys* are often perceived as being weak.

The following section discusses age in relation to the *Nice Guy Paradox*.

8.2.4 Age and the Nice Guy Paradox

According to participant **B** and participant **C**, the *Nice Guy Paradox* applies more strongly in relation to younger people than it does in relation to older people. Participants **B** and **C** both explained that women become more likely to choose *nice guys* as they get older and start prioritising stability and security over excitement. Participant **C** also explained that *nice guys* become more confident and attractive as they get older. Participant **A** did not discuss the impact of age on the *Nice Guy Paradox*.

Applied to Sternberg's (1986) theory, this theme suggests that as women age, there comes a point at which they begin to prioritize the decision/commitment component of love over the passion component of love. This theme also links with research that emphasizes the importance of relationship context, with

respect to the type of characteristics/men that women desire (Herold & Milhausen, 1999; Regan, 1998a, 1998b; Regan, Levin, Sprecher, Christopher & Cate, 2000; Sprecher & Regan, 2002). Such research suggests that traits such as kindness and warmth may be of less importance to women seeking short-term, casual sexual relationships, as opposed to long term relationships. On the basis of theme, it could be argued that women seeking short-term, casual sexual relationships would be more likely to be younger women rather than older women.

The following section discusses the trait of niceness in men, in relation to the *Nice Guy Paradox*.

8.2.5 Niceness is a desirable trait in a man

All the participants value the trait of niceness in men. They explained that nice men without the other *nice guy* characteristics are attractive to women and emphasized certain particularly problematic *nice guy* characteristics. Participants **A** and **B** both mentioned submissiveness. Participant **B** also mentioned trying too hard to please women (being too nice). Participant **C** mentioned *nice guys'* lack of confidence.

This theme may help to explain why the self-report studies cited in Chapter 2 demonstrate that women find the characteristic of kindness in men very desirable (Buss & Angleitner, 1989; Buss & Barnes, 1986; Desrochers, 1995; Doosje, Rojahn & Fischer, 1999; Evans & Brase, 2007; Goodwin, 1990; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1995; Khallad, 2005; Lippa, 2007; Regan, 1998a, 1998b; Regan & Berscheid, 1997; Regan, Levin, Sprecher, Christopher & Cate, 2000; Sprecher & Regan, 2002; Wiederman & Dubois, 1998).

This theme might also help to explain why the behavioural studies cited in Chapter 2 do not seem to support the idea of the *Nice Guy Paradox* (Botwin, Buss & Shackelford, 1997; Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Feingold, 1990; Fletcher, Tither, O'Loughlin, Friesen & Overall, 2004; Herold & Milhausen, 1999; Jensen-Campbell, Graziano & West, 1995; Sheldon, 2007; Sprecher, 1989;

Urbaniak & Kilmann, 2003; Wiederman & Dubois, 1998). These studies conceptualise *nice guys* with respect to characteristics such as kindness, warmth, trustworthiness, attentiveness, sensitivity, prosocial orientation, expressiveness and shyness, with different studies incorporating different characteristics. Thus, there is no clear consensus among these studies about what exactly constitutes a *nice guy*. Having said this, with the exception of shyness, the above-mentioned characteristics all seem to be directly related to the concept of niceness.

The current study suggests that *nice guys* are nice to women. However, it also suggests that they try too hard to please women, are submissive to women and lack confidence. While all the behavioural studies incorporate an abundance of characteristics that relate to niceness, only one study incorporates a characteristic (shyness) that could be argued to relate directly to low self confidence (Herold & Milhausen, 1999). In addition, only one study incorporates a characteristic (dominance) that relates to submissiveness (Jensen-Campbell, Graziano & West, 1995). None of the behavioural studies incorporate characteristics that seem to relate directly to the tendency to try too hard to please women. Thus, the current study's characterization of *nice guys* would seem to differ significantly from the conceptions of *nice guys* found in the behavioural studies cited in Chapter 2.

Considering this theme, it seems that the behavioural studies cited in Chapter 2 incorporate the one desirable *nice guy* characteristic (niceness), but fail to adequately incorporate the other problematic, unattractive *nice guy* characteristics. This may help to explain why *nice guys*, as conceptualised by the researchers that conducted the behavioural studies cited in Chapter 2, were not found to be at a disadvantage with respect to women's mate preferences. Having said this, as mentioned in Chapter 2, it is also possible that behavioural studies are simply too far-removed from reality to produce results that actually reflect women's real-life mate choices.

The sections that follow discuss the *Nice Guy Paradox* within a phenomenological framework.

8.3 Using a phenomenological framework to assess the experience of the Nice Guy Paradox

With a view to placing the *Nice Guy Paradox* in context, the following sections attempt to relate the participants' experiences of the *Nice Guy Paradox* to some of the phenomenological concepts outlined in Chapter 3. Specifically, the concepts of the life-world, being-in-the-world, human bodiliness and intentionality of consciousness are incorporated in the discussions that follow.

8.3.1. Life-world (*Lebenswelt*)

In taking a phenomenological approach to this study, the researcher attempted to access the participants' most rudimentary experiences of the *Nice Guy Paradox*. From a phenomenological perspective, these experiences are inextricably entangled in the respective life-worlds of the participants. Thus, in understanding the participants' experiences of the *Nice Guy Paradox*, insight into their experiences of life in general is also gained.

The participants' rudimentary experiences of the *Nice Guy Paradox* can be thought of as starting points for knowledge. Thus, these experiences are put forward as a foundation on which to build further research around the phenomenon of *Nice Guy Paradox*.

8.3.2 Being-in-the-world

As explained in Chapter 3, the concept of being-in-the-world refers to the indissoluble relationship of the individual with his or her world. The participants' experiences of the *Nice Guy Paradox* reflect this concept in various ways.

The *Umwelt* refers to the individual's perception of his or her relationship with the physical or biological world. Participant **A**'s discussion of physical attractiveness is indicative of a certain awareness of this relationship. It illustrates that her experience of the *Nice Guy Paradox* can not be separated

from her experience of the physical world. Participant **B** and participant **C**'s references to the factor of age in relation to the *Nice Guy Paradox* also demonstrate a certain awareness of this relationship. These references illustrate that their experiences of the *Nice Guy Paradox* can not be separated from their experiences of the biological world.

The *Mitwelt* refers to the person's perception of and orientation towards his or her interaction with the social world. The *Nice Guy Paradox* is a social perception. Consequently, this study required participants to draw very heavily on their experiences of the social world and to become highly aware of their relationships with and their perceptions of this world. The essential structure of the participants' social experiences of the *Nice Guy Paradox* is primarily focused on the participants' experiences of the *nice guys* referred to by the *Nice Guy Paradox*, and their romantic interactions with women.

The *Eigenwelt* refers to the individual's relationship with him or herself. The participants all referred to *nice guys*' low levels of confidence in themselves. In addition, they all reflected on their own emotional states or lack thereof (excitement, irritation, frustration, attraction *etcetera*) in relation to their experiences of *nice guys*. These references and personal reflections are indicative of a certain awareness of the *Eigenwelt* and they illustrate the way in which participants' experiences of the *Nice Guy Paradox* can not be separated from their experiences of being in relationship with themselves.

8.3.3 Human bodiliness

The body shapes itself according to its task in the world. For instance, the aggressive stride of a dominant personality contrasts with the uncertain shuffle of a submissive personality. This idea is illustrated by participant **B**'s discussion of how *nice guys* submit to women emotionally and psychologically, as well as physically. Their submissive natures permeate into physical expression and they tend to submit to women's physical, literal leadership, as opposed to confidently and dominantly assuming physical leadership.

Man is generally unaware of his own body until it becomes an object for him. One way in which a man's body can become objectified to some extent for himself, is through the internalisation of a social schema which requires him to have a body for others. In this way, man becomes aware of the extent to which his own body fulfills social requirements, and in this sense, becomes more aware of his body as an object (Kruger, 1988). Considering this idea, *nice guys'* lack of confidence (as described by all the participants) might be argued to have some relation to their internalisation of social schemas which make them more aware of their bodies as objects. As they grow up and become aware of their bodies as objects, *nice guys* may become aware of their physical short-comings (as described by participant **A**), which could have an impact on their levels of confidence.

8.3.4 Intentionality of consciousness

Consciousness can not be conceptualized in and of itself. Consciousness is always focused on an object. This study asked participants to make the *Nice Guy Paradox* the object of their consciousness in order to understand their conscious experience of this social phenomenon. Through an understanding of the participants' conscious experience of the *Nice Guy Paradox*, this research aims to provide fundamental knowledge about this object of consciousness. However, due to the phenomenological approach of this research, this study also provides insight into the nature of consciousness itself. For instance, all three interviews illustrate that while consciousness can be focused to some extent, it is fundamentally dynamic in nature and its focus is constantly shifting.

The section that follows synthesizes the central themes of the *Nice Guy Paradox* into an essential structure, thereby providing an overview of the current study's findings.

8.4 A synthesis of the central themes of the phenomenon of the Nice Guy Paradox

The essential structure of the participants' experiences of the *Nice Guy Paradox* seems to be the following:

Fundamentally, *nice guys* lack confidence. These men try too hard to please women and are submissive in relationships.

Nice guys finish last in the sense that they are mistreated and rejected by women. There are various reasons for *nice guys* finishing last. Firstly, they allow themselves to be mistreated because of their submissive tendencies. Secondly, relationships with these men are not challenging and exciting. Thirdly, women find *nice guy* characteristics irritating and frustrating. Fourthly, women are attracted to certain characteristics, which *nice guys* lack. These characteristics include dominance, strength, physical attractiveness, confidence, leadership and social status.

The *Nice Guy Paradox* applies more strongly to younger people than older people.

Niceness in isolation is a desirable trait in a man. However, the other *nice guy* characteristics are unattractive to women.

8.5 Conclusion

This chapter has integrated the meaning units from all three interviews inter-individually, resulting in central themes relating to the phenomenon of the *Nice Guy Paradox*. These themes were considered with reference to literature presented in Chapter 2 and the participants' experiences of the *Nice Guy Paradox* were discussed within the framework of phenomenology and its concepts. Finally, these central themes were synthesized to provide the essential structure of the participants' experiences of the *Nice Guy Paradox*.

This research was performed with the goal of attaining a fundamental understanding of the *Nice Guy Paradox* and providing some foundational knowledge about this social phenomenon. On the basis of this knowledge, there exist various potentialities for further research. The following chapter explores these potentialities and makes certain recommendations. It also evaluates the present study with respect to its strengths and limitations.



CHAPTER 9

EVALUATION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The previous chapter concluded with an overview of the current study's findings in an essential description of the participants' experiences of the *Nice Guy Paradox*. On the basis of these findings, the present chapter makes certain recommendations. In addition, this chapter evaluates the current study and provides suggestions for future research.

9.1 Recommendations with regard to the findings of the current study

On the basis of the essential structure of the participants' experiences of the *Nice Guy Paradox*, the following recommendations are put forward:

9.1.1 Education

The *Nice Guy Paradox* causes much frustration and confusion for self-proclaimed *nice guys* (Urbaniak & Kilmann, 2003). In addition, as discussed in Chapter 2, it may have negative implications for the way in which men learn to treat women. Findings of the current study suggest that the *Nice Guy Paradox* applies more strongly to younger people than older people. Thus, it is recommended that people in general, but relatively young men in particular, be educated about the *Nice Guy Paradox*.

The finding that niceness is a desirable trait in men needs to be emphasized. It is important that men understand that they do not need to start treating women badly in order to be attractive. However, they should also be informed that having low levels of confidence, being submissive and trying too hard to please women have been found to be unattractive characteristics. Men need to understand that according to the current study's findings, the desirable characteristic of niceness is often accompanied by these other undesirable characteristics, which constitute the real reasons that the *nice guys* referred to

by the *Nice Guy Paradox* are mistreated and rejected by women. Thus, while men seeking to improve their romantic relations with women would do well to bear in mind that trying too hard to please women is not advisable, they should be encouraged to focus on concepts and pursuits related to confidence building and assertiveness training rather than niceness.

The following sections discuss some practical suggestions regarding the recommended education discussed above.

9.1.1.1 Education in schools

Many schools have specific classes in which the above education could be implemented. For example, this type of teaching may be appropriate as a part of sexual education classes. Alternatively, it could be integrated into guidance or life skills classes. One way or another, young people need to be educated to some extent about romantic relationships. The findings of this study might add some value in this sphere of education. In addition, these findings may help to promote understanding and to prevent the potentially negative impact that the perception of the *Nice Guy Paradox* could be having on relationships in society.

9.1.1.2 Education through the media

The media, which is becoming increasingly psychologised, offers a huge abundance of information focused on romantic relationships. The *Nice Guy Paradox* seems to be a point of public interest at the moment and has already gained a fair degree of media attention. For instance, examples of the sentiment that nice guys finish last can be found readily in the popular press and multiple internet sites are devoted to this topic (Urbaniak & Kilmann, 2003). The relevant findings of the current study could be presented through the media clearly and simply. This would make these findings accessible to the general public and may help people (especially those outside of the psychological community) gain a better understanding of the *Nice Guy*

Paradox. In this way, the potentially negative impact of the perception of the *Nice Guy Paradox* may be reduced.

9.1.2 Clinical application

It is suggested that it might be worthwhile for clinicians to add the findings of the current study to their repertoires of psychological knowledge. These findings may be particularly useful when trying to understanding men that have problematic romantic relationships. For example, a young, male patient might report a history of being rejected and/or mistreated by women in spite of significant effort on his part to please women. If the therapist noticed that this patient was likeable, but also characteristically submissive (in his relationships and/or therapy), the findings of the current study might help the therapist to identify an underlying self-confidence problem, which could help to inform and direct future therapy.

The above sections have discussed recommendations with regard to the findings of the current study. It has been suggested that men be educated about the *Nice Guy Paradox*. Practically, this might be achieved through schools and the media. It has also been suggested that the findings of the current study may have some clinical relevance. The following sections evaluate the current research.

9.2 Evaluation of the study

The strengths and limitations of this study are presented in the sections that follow. It is important that the findings of this study always be presented and considered within the context of this evaluation.

9.2.1 Strengths of the study

The following strengths of the current study have been identified:

- The literature review revealed that while there are various studies on women's mate preferences, there is not much research that focuses directly on the *Nice Guy Paradox*. In addition, this chapter demonstrated that the results of quantitative research relating to the *Nice Guy Paradox* are somewhat contradictory in nature. The literature search only yielded one very limited qualitative study that focuses on the *Nice Guy Paradox*. However, the relative value of qualitative research on the *Nice Guy Paradox* was demonstrated in this chapter.
- Chapter 3 illustrated the suitability of the phenomenological method of inquiry utilized by this study. This chapter demonstrated the importance of unprejudiced, understanding-oriented research as a starting point for the investigation of a complex social phenomenon. The current study constitutes the first phenomenological study on the *Nice Guy Paradox*.
- The open-ended interview approach provided participants with the freedom to relate their most rudimentary experiences of the *Nice Guy Paradox*, thereby complementing the phenomenological orientation of this study. The method of data-analysis is very transparent, which allows the validity of this study to speak for itself.
- The findings of the current study make sense in relation to the somewhat contradictory literature presented in Chapter 2. In addition, these findings are meaningfully discussed within the phenomenological framework.
- The results of the current study may be applicable within contexts such as education and clinical practice. In addition, on the basis of these results, there exist potentialities with respect to future research. Suggestions in relation to these potentialities are detailed later in this chapter.

9.2.2 Limitations of the study

The following limitations of the current study have been identified:

- Some of the literature presented in Chapter 2 of this study is somewhat outdated. In certain areas, the literature search simply failed to yield more recent literature. However, where possible, older references were supported with more recent ones.
- The sample of participants in this research was small and not very heterogeneous. There were only three participants. These participants are all white, relatively privileged, South African women, who were in their early twenties and were studying university degrees at the time of the interviews. These factors may limit the generalizability of the study's findings. Having said this, qualitative studies do not generally concern themselves with issues of representation and generalizability when selecting participants. These studies are more concerned with selecting participants that will best answer the research question. The rationales behind the specific participant selection criteria utilized in this study are outlined in Chapter 4.
- As a subjective being-in-the-world, the researcher would inevitably have had some influence on the collection and analysis of data. However, as the phenomenological method dictates, the researcher adopted an attitude of reduction, in that he tried to bracket his own knowledge as far as possible, in order to accurately describe and analyze the participants' experiences of the *Nice Guy Paradox*.
- An independent researcher may not agree with certain methods, procedures and/or interpretations contained in this study. For this reason, the researcher attempted to make this research very transparent. For instance, interviews were transcribed verbatim with non-verbal expressions indicated in brackets and themes were justified

The following section provides suggestions for future research.

9.3 Recommendations for future research

On the basis of this study, it is suggested that there has not been enough research focused directly on the *Nice Guy Paradox*. Further, it is suggested that the research that has focused on this social phenomenon has been somewhat presumptuous. This research has approached the *Nice Guy Paradox* quantitatively without first seeking to understand it qualitatively. For this reason, much of this research does not help to explain why the perception of the *Nice Guy Paradox* exists. Thus, with regard to future research, the following suggestions are put forward:

- Further qualitative investigation would help to consolidate and expand on the preliminary understanding of the *Nice Guy Paradox* that exists at this point in time. In this vein, the following considerations may be worth taking into account:
 - The findings of this research and the findings of other qualitative research done by Herold and Milhausen (1999) are fairly compatible. It would be interesting to compare these findings with the findings of research that utilizes more diverse samples. For instance, older people, males and people from different cultural, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds could be included in these samples.
 - Somewhat more structured methods of qualitative inquiry may provide useful ways of gaining clarity in particular areas of interest. For example, a study might focus solely on age in relation to the *Nice Guy Paradox*, or on the development of a *nice guy*.

- This research has not focused on the subject of the *bad boy*. However, this concept appears to have certain links with the *Nice Guy Paradox* and investigation in this area may add to the richness of understanding around the phenomenon.
- Once a firm foundation of qualitative knowledge around the *Nice Guy Paradox* has been established, new quantitative studies could be conceptualised. These studies would be well-grounded in prior research and could serve to confirm or disconfirm hypotheses made on the basis of qualitative investigations. In this way, the generalizability of combined qualitative findings in relation to the *Nice Guy Paradox* could be tested.

9.4 Conclusion

This study has utilized a phenomenological approach in order to focus on women's understanding of the *Nice Guy Paradox*. In this way, the researcher has attempted to gain insight about this perception in order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the reasons for its existence. It is hoped that the rich descriptions and analyses yielded by this study adequately communicate the complexities and commonalities of the participants' experiences of the social phenomenon known as *Nice Guy Paradox*.

This study supports a fresh understanding of the *Nice Guy Paradox*. This understanding is based women's rudimentary experiences of this phenomenon. It is believed that these experiences are able to contribute meaningfully to an explanation of why this perception has become a social phenomenon. It is also believed, that when viewed from within the framework, or essential phenomenological structure, of these experiences, much of the prior research performed on this topic can be placed in context.

The findings of this study may have certain practical applications. However, primarily, it is hoped that these findings will inspire further research and understanding with regard to the *Nice Guy Paradox*.

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