

# Chapter 4

## Sex as a Commodity and the Regulation of Sexuality

Have you ever removed or shaved off any part of your body hair, such as body hair on your face, armpits, legs, or genitalia, or had piercings or other body modifications? Have you ever had or thought about having elective surgery (not medically necessary) for the purposes of modification or enhancement of your body or perceived attractiveness? Have you ever viewed erotic images for sexual pleasure? What do you think of the people who appear in such photographs or videos? Is there a difference between a famous movie star being paid \$20 million to simulate a sexual encounter and an actor in an erotic video being paid \$200 to film an actual sexual encounter for a web video? What if someone is paid \$200 to have sex (not to be filmed but instead for the pleasure of the person paying)? What if a couple makes a picture or video at no cost solely for their own use? What if the partners in that couple are exhibitionists and at no charge post their video on an amateur porn site, turned on by the knowledge that others will be watching them and voting their video the most popular of the week?

While one could argue that pornography, prostitution, shaving body hair, and cosmetic enlargements of breasts are entirely different from one another, they have some conceptual similarities. All involve an aspect of sexual appearance or behavior and some type of commercial activity, monetization, or commodification of sex or sexuality (an objectification of the body and of sex). All vary substantially in their specifics by culture and history yet relate in some way to evolved aspects of sexuality that have some cross-cultural similarities. For example, while shaving body hair could be seen as entirely cultural, it relates to a cross-cultural universal of wanting to be socially desirable and desired (thus in a culture where most people shave, the desire to shave is high, while in a culture where few people shave, the desire to shave is low). All these examples have at some time been regulated socially and codified into law and even today are legal and common in some regions while illegal or socially unacceptable in other regions. For example, some religious traditions today prohibit males from shaving facial hair, while in some cultures doing this is the norm; many regions restrict pornography

and prostitution, while others allow these in varying degrees; and elective cosmetic surgeries for breast enlargement are rare in some regions while common in others.

Consider body hair. While individuals vary in their desire to be attractive, the desire to be liked and to be attractive is present in many individuals in all cultures, and in all cultures this includes to some extent the appearance of the body. Next, there is a substantial component of cultural relativism; a quick glance of photographs taken in different regions today or taken within the same region but across different decades shows markedly variable norms in the types of hair or body hair that are (or were) trendy, common, or shunned. If you have friends who live in a society that is largely urban and industrialized today, chances are high that the styles there were very different just a decade or two earlier, as styles tend to change rapidly in industrialized societies. Body hair also has both biological sex differences and sociocultural gender differences. At times culture increases the biologically based sexual differentiation that exists in the distribution of body hair, while at times it lessens the biological sex differences, and at other times it arbitrarily targets one part of the body. In the United States, for example, in the 1950s, leg shaving and armpit shaving was typical for females and not for males, and in the 1960s, it was trendy for young adults of both sexes to leave all body hair unshaved, and genital hair shaving was unusual in both sexes. In the 2010s in the United States, it is not unusual for either sex to leave genital hair, and it is also not unusual for either sex to remove it. Some sex differences in hair removal exist in the 2010s; for example, among males who remove some body hair, more remove hair from their chest or genital region than their legs or underarms, whereas among females who remove some body hair, more remove hair from their legs and underarms than from their genital region.

In terms of commodification, a multibillion-dollar market exists around body hair modification. This market in part responds to the desires of consumers and in part actively shapes that desire to enhance sales and profit. Gillette, a maker of razors, has used the slogan “You might say when there’s no underbrush, the trees look taller,” in a marketing campaign, in part in response to a trend of male genital and chest shaving and in part to encourage it, as male body hair removal is a relatively new billion-dollar market (Gillette, 2009). <sup>101</sup> While body hair removal is a personal choice in industrialized countries, it has historically been a matter of religious law in some religions and is still

socially regulated in some groups to such an extent that it is a de facto law. For example, all branches of the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) have ultraconservative sects that prohibit men from shaving their beards, and males who violate this cultural norm face expulsion from their community.

In this chapter, we consider many aspects of the commodification of sexuality as well as their complex histories of legal and social regulation. This chapter may be read in two parts. In one part, we have three sections. One section considers perceived inadequacies, bodily enhancements, elective surgery, and the role of culture in affecting body satisfaction. In another section, we consider erotica, pornography, and the Internet by exploring current research, history, and legal attempts to define obscenity and restrict pornography. A third section focuses on prostitution, human trafficking, and legalized sex work. The second part of the chapter has a single section which looks toward the future. Here we briefly examine integrative themes of the entire text and near future trends, and conclude with a sci-fi-esque speculation about sexual technologies and social trends in the more distant future.

## 4.1 Enhancements, Surgery, and Objectification

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe specific modifications and enhancements that people undergo in order to change sexual performance and appearance, including the risks associated with these.
2. Describe the process of sexual objectification and its potential impact on women.

### Sexual Enhancements and Perceived Inadequacies

Many people who have healthy sexual functioning nevertheless perceive that they are performing inadequately or do not feel as physically attractive as they would like to feel, and they may seek to modify their sexual functioning or bodily appearance. In industrialized nations, elective and cosmetic surgery are widely practiced, although people differ sharply as to whether they believe that these procedures are exploitive or simply an extension of current technology to a human tradition of modifying the self and appearance that can be seen in most cultures, including preindustrial and tribal societies. While research cannot answer whether elective modifications are appropriate or not, it can show whether or not culture influences the choices people make and if particular influences leave people more or less happy. The answer from empirical studies is that culture

does influence individual body perception and that unrealistic images can lead to individual psychological distress.

In particular, unrepresentative images of body weight and appearance in the media can increase dissatisfaction that people have with typical, healthy bodies and can affect perceptions of what normal weight and appearance are, and they have been associated with an increase in damaging behavior, such as eating disorders. Many countries, including the United States, have long placed limitations on advertising dangerous substances such as cigarettes or alcohol, but forced limitations on images that affect body image self-concept are more controversial. Images of men that are unrealistically toned and muscled have also been associated with steroid abuse by males.

France initially called for voluntary limitations on advertising models who are too thin. When they did not get cooperation from the fashion industry, they passed a law in April 2015 requiring all models to have a BMI of at least 18. Failure to abide by this law could result in fines and imprisonment.

## **France Passes Law Limiting Ultra-Thin Models**

*Concerned about the rate of anorexia in their country, lawmakers passed a law banning ultra-thin models.*

*YouTube*

One type of sexual enhancement that people seek is to improve performance in terms of duration of arousal or ability to maintain arousal regardless of circumstance. The very existence of a desire or arousal disorder may in part be a matter of unrealistic expectations. For example, alcohol use can impair sexual arousal in both sexes, although its effect is more easily noticeable in males. Situations that create anxiety, such as sex in front of a group of observers, can also impair arousal. The pornographic film industry for many decades had a problem in which male actors frequently were unable to get or maintain erections under the conditions of filming (bright lights, people watching, and extended requirements to have sex longer than most people have sex). This led to the creation of the “fluffer”—a person who the actor found especially attractive who would perform oral sex on the actor in between takes to help him become aroused. One very average looking male, Ron Jeremy, had the unusual ability to sustain an erection regardless of circumstance, as well as a much larger than average penis, and was featured in more than 2,000 erotic films—a world record. The development of drugs to treat arousal

disorders has resulted in their common use in erotic films by males, as they may help maintain erections under circumstances where otherwise a male might experience a situational arousal problem. Erotic films are obviously staged but may give people an unrealistic expectation about sexual performance or about the typical range of body sizes and appearances. Males in such films typically have larger penises than average and have more musculature and less body fat than is typical, and females often are portrayed with larger breasts, smaller labia minora, less body fat, and less pubic hair than is typical. Anecdotal reports suggest that female porn stars are more likely than male porn stars to have undergone surgical alteration, such as breast augmentation or labiaplasty.

Arousal disorder drugs—the PDE-5 inhibitors—are also used recreationally by a small percentage of males in the general population. In one study, 1.4% of college males reported currently using the drugs recreationally (without medical need; Harte & Meston, 2011).<sup>104</sup> As the drugs' effect is to maintain erection, they also have this effect in healthy males. As healthy males by definition do not have a problem with erection, the effect may only be noticed situationally (e.g., when a male is anxious or intoxicated and has situational impairment in arousal), causing erection to last longer and be firmer than it otherwise might be in those circumstances. They may also reduce the refractory period, permitting repeat sex sooner than would otherwise be possible. Recreational use of PDE-5 inhibitors has also been reported by people who use illegal psychoactive drugs that impair sexual functioning but increase sexual desire, such as methamphetamine, and studies have shown such use to be correlated with males who are more likely to have risky, unprotected sex and thus to have higher rates of HIV infection.

Aphrodisiacs are *substances that people take to enhance sexual desire, arousal, or performance but are not medically validated and usually have no value beyond placebo effects*. For millennia, people have claimed that rare and exotic substances, such as tiger testicles or rhinoceros horns, improve sexual performance, particularly in males.

Trading and hunting of endangered species in the modern world is frequently driven by a market for aphrodisiacs, particularly in recently wealthy regions of the world such as China and the Middle East, where rapid urbanization has led to a highly affluent minority being able to afford very high prices, and recent industrialization means that traditional preindustrial beliefs continue about the sexual enhancement effects of exotic animal products (such beliefs were also common in Western countries in earlier times). With the exception of some plant-based compounds such as yohimbine, any benefits from animal-derived aphrodisiacs are entirely due to the placebo effect, which may be intensified by their inclusion in pills or powders that taste

strong or in ointments or creams that cause genital tingling. Perception can affect arousal, as seen in clinical studies on androgen patches where placebo groups also experience an increase in arousal, and so the individuals (mostly males) taking aphrodisiacs made from exotic animals may well believe they are benefitting.

### **Body Modification: Shaving, Breast Modification, Genital Surgery, and So Forth**

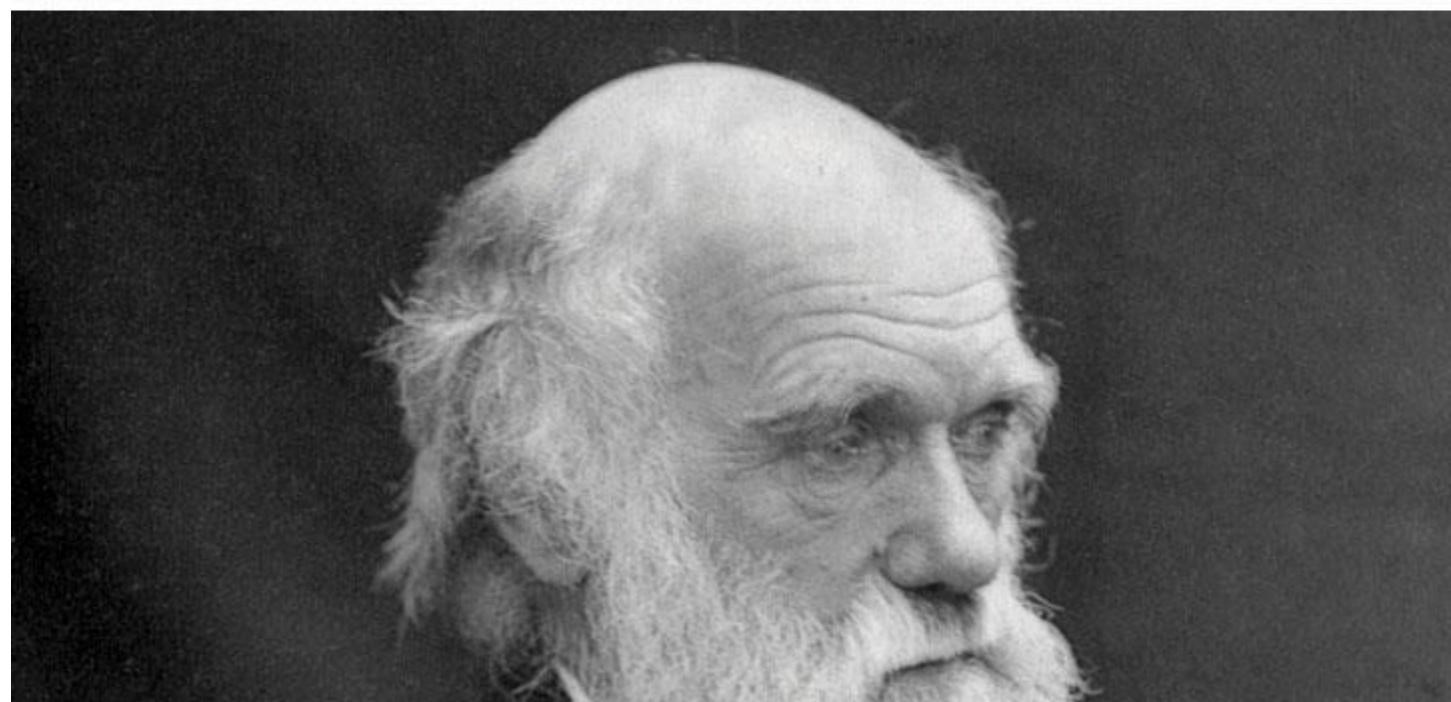
In most cultures, there are some ideals of beauty that are universal and other ideals that are culturally specific (universals are identified with research data in [Chapter 3 "Attraction, Arousal, Response, and Sexual Orientation"](#)). A culture-specific body modification that is attractive in one culture or era in history may be considered a horrible disfigurement in another culture or era. Examples of these, which are either attractive or disfiguring depending on one's era and point of view, have included the following: short stubble beards, long beards that extend almost to a male's navel; moustaches; facial tattoos; body tattoos; wooden sticks placed through nostrils; and hoops, metal rods, or discs placed in or through the nipples, penis, earlobes, eyebrows, tongue, lips, navel, and so forth (the list is quite long). These modifications are often performed for general feelings about self-image and appearance and for one's own perceptions of what is attractive. They may also respond to cultural norms of what is attractive (to be desirable to others) or directly be arousing for others. Piercings can also enhance or alter physical and sexual sensations of being touched, particularly for nipple, genital, and tongue piercings (both for the person pierced and for a partner). Specific risks associated with genital piercings are discussed in [Chapter 13 "Sexually Transmitted Infections and Prevention"](#). We encourage you to explore the Internet to see the great variety of bodily adornments and modifications that exist across cultures, including lip discs, voluntary branding of the skin, and piercings, a few of which are shown in [Figure 4.1 "Bodily Modifications and Adornments"](#). Of course, many individuals prefer no body modification at all, and one might predict that if most people modified their bodies, going without piercings and modifications might become the new countercultural expression.

If you are reading this in a college environment, chances are you see many body piercings every day that you would not see in people if you were reading this in a retirement community. Of course, there are always individuals who differ from their cultural context, but an important point is that whether any of the aforementioned are normatively attractive—liked by a substantial group or just a rare few eccentrics—is culturally determined, as is whether they are specific to one sex or common for both sexes (consider the case of earrings in the 1920s compared with earrings in the 2010s). Interestingly, related to the philosophical issue of whether humans have free will, within any one culture and historical time period, most individuals who are

conforming to cultural norms feel they are freely making the choice to modify their body, do not consider it forced on them, and enjoy the modification.

*Figure 4.1 Bodily Modifications and Adornments* <sup>[2]</sup>







*Shown here are photographs of bodily modifications and adornments from different cultures and historical eras that are thought to enhance attractiveness. The top row from left to right shows a lip plate worn by a Murzi woman; ear plugs and makeup on a Northern Thai hill tribe woman. Bottom row from left to right shows Charles Darwin's long beard, which was fashionable among 19th century British gentlemen; a stubble beard, ear plugs, and a tattoo fashionable among early 21st century young American males.*

Do you shave your body hair? You may not think of this as a culturally determined modification, but, like hairstyles, it of course is. Biologically, some ethnic groups have more body hair than others, and there are also sex differences. On average and within most ethnic groups, males have more body hair and facial hair than females. Of course, individuals of either sex may prefer to have more or less body hair than they have, or they may be happy with their natural appearance. However, many females naturally have a significant amount of body hair on their legs, upper lips, arms, and armpits, and in contemporary industrialized societies, for many decades a majority of females have removed this body hair to create the appearance of having less hair on the legs, upper lip, and armpits than they may naturally have. A very profitable industry exists in selling razors, shaving creams, depilatories, and treatments such as hot waxes to remove body hair, including, in some cases, hair from the genital region. While shaving historically in men was confined to facial hair, in the last decade, “manscaping” has become more common, involving removing chest hair and other body hair, perhaps because more people prefer a partner with less body hair—and also perhaps because major corporations have realized that a nearly two-billion-dollar hair removal market could be doubled if both sexes become as eager to remove naturally occurring body hair in the 21st century as just females were for much of the 20th century. In the United States alone, the market for shaving and hair removal is more than \$1.8 billion (Research and Markets, 2008). <sup>[3]</sup>

Cosmetic surgery procedures that are not necessary but “enhance” the body to a perceived ideal include modifications to the nose and face, reductions of body fat, and removing the appearance of facial aging and wrinkles through face-lifts and Botox (a prescription drug that paralyzes facial muscles). All such treatments can have side effects and are not medically necessary. In East Asia, many women have surgery on their eyelids to create a creased lid that makes a larger apparent eye opening, which is a feature more typically found in Caucasians. Many people embrace such modifications in order to appear closer to ideals of youth or beauty promoted within their dominant culture or to feel better about themselves, which indirectly relates to sexual functioning.

Cosmetic procedures have been developed that directly relate to secondary sexual characteristics. The most common such example is breast surgery. Techniques developed for breast reconstruction after cancer surgery have turned into a very profitable industry for procedures, which are not medically necessary, to enlarge breasts in healthy women. . More recently, surgeons have started to advertise a wider range of services for both sexes: in males, these services include penile enhancement surgery and implants that give the appearance of larger calf muscles in the leg or pectoral muscles in the chest; in females, these services include vaginal rejuvenation and labial reductions. Many of these procedures exist with little research as to their safety or efficacy, such as whether people achieve advertised claims of lengthening or tightening. Others appear to be relatively safe and have a high probability of achieving the desired outcome. We now explore data on the efficacy and safety of specific procedures.

The desire to modify the penis is not new. It was written about thousands of years ago in the Kama Sutra, where a particularly unpleasant-sounding treatment involves rubbing the penis with a mixture of oil and hairs from a tree-dwelling insect called the shūka for 10 nights until swelling and pain occurs (some translations suggest that this means the stingers from bees or wasps, but the exact identity of the species has been lost to history). Modern operations to lengthen or thicken the penis may sever internal ligaments, resulting in the penis apparently lengthening by hanging lower from the body (as a portion of the shaft is internal in the body), remove body fat from the mons above the penis, or insert tissue from elsewhere in the body to make the penis appear thicker. Cosmetic surgeons rarely participate in random controlled clinical trials (without such controlled trials, some of their procedures may have no more empirical support of efficacy than those of the Kama Sutra!). Limited studies on the outcomes of modern penile enhancement surgery suggest that males are often satisfied with the outcome (about two-thirds of those who undergo such surgeries), but side effects were frequently observed, and typical gains in length were modest, at an increase by about 3.5 cm when flaccid and 1.8 cm erect (slightly more and slightly less, respectively, than an inch). <sup>[4]</sup> Despite numerous claims of substances that enlarge the penis, only surgical techniques can do so and, even then, most only affect the appearance of the flaccid penis (not necessarily its erect size). Substantial scarring and impairment in erection (including internal scar tissue that actually pulls the penis farther back into the body) are possible side effects of such surgery, and most men who seek enlargement have penises that are well within the typical size range to begin with. Researchers recommend psychotherapy to encourage satisfaction with one's penis and to carefully educate patients about the potential negative effects of surgery (Nugteren et al., 2010). <sup>[5]</sup>

Other nonsurgical techniques are both ancient and widely marketed in the modern world but have little empirical support (Oderda & Gontero, 2011).<sup>[6]</sup> These include jelqing (exercises to tug at the penis to stretch it) and using penile extension weights designed to stretch the penis over time. Another type of modification is foreskin “reconstruction” for circumcised males who do not wish to be circumcised (typically who had the procedure performed while they were infants), which involves attaching incremental weights or traction devices to skin near the glans that are designed to stretch the skin over the glans, creating a pseudo foreskin. While skin on the body can clearly be stretched (including nipples) with repeated application of weights or tension (such as earlobe implants known as gauges), there is little medical literature on the safety or efficacy of nonsurgical penile stretching. Gontero et al. (2009)<sup>[7]</sup> performed one of the few existing studies, finding a statistically significant increase in penis size of 2.3 cm when flaccid and 1.7 cm when erect (less than 1 inch). Although they did not find serious side effects in the medically monitored at-home stretching (practiced at least 4 hours a day for 6 months), there is an abundance of other medical literature on damage caused to the penis skin and penile structure from many types of physical trauma, and most stretching does not take place under medical guidance. As described in [Chapter 7 "Sexual Behavior Across Cultures"](#), penis extenders can be used for partners who desire a larger penetrative experience.

Vaginal rejuvenation and labiaplasty are two additional body modifications which were covered in Chapter 1.

Although all surgeries can have complications, including death, breast implants are particularly controversial, as even after a successful operation, implants have a lifespan of a decade or two. Elective breast surgery can consist of reduction, reshaping, equalizing breast size where there is a visible discrepancy in breast size (a common occurrence), or, most widely known and practiced, enlargement or augmentation of breast size utilizing some type of implant. Implants may also be used in reconstructive surgery after some types of mastectomy (breast removal for cancer treatment). Breast implants are typically silicone shells filled with either saline (a sterile saltwater solution) or a silicone gel. Complications include the possibility of a leak or rupture if a person is involved in an accident as well as the implant leaking, rupturing, or becoming misshapen as it ages and can include difficulty in breast-feeding. Manufacturers of implants do not advertise how long they last; nor are they required to publish data on longevity of implants, and few studies report this data. Cohen, Biggs, Cronin, and Collins (1997)<sup>[8]</sup> found that after 12 or more years, a majority of implants had clearly deteriorated (63%) and estimated that 89% of implants studied had actually failed. A more recent study of a single brand of implant found at 6 years a fairly low failure rate of 1.1% for augmentation and 3.8% for reconstruction but a

much higher rate of patients requiring a second operation to correct problems with the original implant—19.4% for augmentation and 33.9% for reconstruction (Cunningham & McCue, 2009).<sup>[9]</sup> Rates of patient satisfaction were similarly high regardless of whether or not they needed a second surgery, with 97.8% of those who had only needed one surgery indicating that they would have breast implantation again and 98.4% of those who required a reoperation indicating that they would have breast implantation again. At least 1% of women with implants experience significant side effects each year, including the implants rupturing (U.S. Food and Drug Administration, 2011).<sup>[10]</sup> Breast enhancement (typically enlargement) is the second most popular form of cosmetic surgery globally, with more than 1.5 million women having such surgery each year (Bowes & Hebblethwaite, 2012).<sup>[11]</sup>

Leaking silicone gel implants have periodically been implicated in adverse health events. The first implants were used in 1962. From 1992 to 2006, silicone implants were not permitted in the United States, due to concerns about safety (Spear & Jespersen, 2010).<sup>[12]</sup> Although complications can occur from ruptures, and class action law suits were successfully brought against manufacturers for adverse health events related to inflammation, research is not clear as to whether the alleged long-term health effects were really attributable to silicone implants or not. Nevertheless, there are documented cases of specific brands that were thought to have been safe turning out to have been unsafe. The most recent such case occurred in France in late 2011, where more than 30,000 women were found to have received implants made by a now-shut-down French manufacturer that used substandard, nonmedical silicone that was particularly likely to leak and might have been more likely to lead to complications. This led to a decision by French government health officials to pay for removal of the implants in any women who desired removal, even if there were no signs of deterioration (Le Monde, 2011).<sup>[13]</sup>

## **Sexual Objectification**

As Heyes and Jones noted (2009),<sup>[14]</sup> cosmetic surgery exists in a “transnational context” and is intimately tied with cultural conceptualizations of beauty and gender, disproportionately being sought by women who are dissatisfied with their natural bodies. It is sought out both by those in industrialized affluent societies and by affluent individuals in developing economies. Many lower-income people in wealthier countries travel for “medical tourism” to cheaper economies for elective cosmetic surgeries. Heyes and Jones also noted that conceptualization of beauty in historically or predominantly Anglo-European nations affects images of beauty worldwide—for example, the eyelid surgeries that are popular with Asian women to make their eyelids appear

like those of Caucasians. Substantial differences exist between industrialized societies in the acceptability and desirability of cosmetic enhancement. Other authors argue that, from the perspective of personal autonomy, elective surgery is only a variation of an ancient practice of elective body modifications and is value neutral. Sexual objectification refers to *the tendency to view or treat another person as a sexual object for one's pleasure or gratification with little consideration of that person as a human being*. While sexual pleasure absent a relationship is considered immoral from some religious perspectives, a secular feminist philosophy has also suggested that sexual objectification is immoral (Quinn, 2005), <sup>[15]</sup> as it involves treating a person as an object. Other feminist perspectives have related objectification to the historical tendency of patriarchal societies to diminish the status and power of women compared with that of men. Thus women have historically had diminished economic opportunity and independence, and the selling of one's body for sex is an extension of the oppression of women. This would include both literal cases, as in prostitution, and also less literal cases, as in women being valued more for beauty (male pleasure) than for mind or ability. As Zweig phrased it (cited in Quinn, 2005, p. 724), <sup>[16]</sup> "men have been socialized to be 'active-fucker-conqueror,' women to be 'passive-fucked-victim.'" From this perspective, all erotic images or circumstances, such as pornography, film, sex work, and any other context that removes a relationship and emphasizes the sexual pleasure of just one person, would be considered to be objectification, regardless of the sex of the people involved. As Quinn noted (2005), <sup>[17]</sup> some philosophers consider any excitement in another person's body a type of objectification, but others would not consider this the case if such excitement occurred in a reciprocally respectful relationship.

Others are concerned that data showing an overemphasis on unattainable ideals in body image contribute to distortions about ideal body image and to dissatisfaction with one's own body, which may be quite normal. It is worth noting that "normal" includes a typical range that tends, on average, to be average and to include the majority of people. Dissatisfaction with body image has been associated with eating disorders and other injurious behaviors, such as anorexia, bulimia, or steroid abuse. Indeed, media exposure in adolescents affects body image (higher media use is negatively correlated with positive body image; Borzekowski & Bayer, 2005), <sup>[18]</sup> and there is a small to moderate relationship between media exposure and women's body dissatisfaction, internalization of a thin ideal, disordered eating behaviors, and/or distorted beliefs (Grabe, Ward & Hyde, 2008). <sup>[19]</sup> Evidence from neural imaging has linked body dissatisfaction and body image distortion as being higher in people with anorexia than in others (Mohr et al., 2010). <sup>[20]</sup> One contemporary feminist perspective places a moral value on agency (free will and choice) and argues that if a person freely

chooses to be objectified, and enjoys it, then that is a perfectly acceptable choice, both for the person being objectified and for, to use the example of advertisements, the consumers who enjoy looking at attractive people. This perspective also argues that, in a society with many opportunities for educational advancement that are equal for both sexes, there would not be any inherent sexism or exploitation in sexual objectification and that if people enjoy looking at images of others who are statistically uncommon in musculature, thinness, or other physical attributes, so what? In contrast, Levy (2006) <sup>[21]</sup> argued that the sexual objectification of women has increased since the early 2000s and that much of this is driven by women themselves, with the negative consequence of reducing women's power and individuality. Nussbaum (1995) <sup>[22]</sup> argued that objectification of either sex can occur for multiple reasons, some of which are negative, some of which are neutral, and some of which may be positive aspects of sexual pleasure.

Regardless of whether one considers objectification negative or positive (or some middle ground with both negative and positive aspects), both sexes in industrialized societies are often objectified, and it is easy to find evidence that objectification of both sexes has been increasing. Beauty pageants, film and media, modeling, and advertising all place special emphasis on individuals who look highly attractive, regardless of their other qualities as human beings, and obviously many people enjoy looking at attractive film and TV personalities. Figure 4.2 "Varying Body Standards for Popular Males" shows different images of western male physical attractiveness in recent decades.

*Figure 4.2 Varying Body Standards for Popular Males* <sup>[23]</sup>





*Compare The Osmonds, a U.S. boy band at their most successful in the 1970s, to One Direction, a British boy band popular in the 2010s.*

While “sex sells” may indeed be the case in film and media, it has mixed research support when it comes to advertising. Sexually explicit images are more likely to be remembered in advertising (Gallup & Robinson, 2008) <sup>[24]</sup> but at times may serve as a distraction that causes less memory for a product itself (Jones, Stanaland, & Gelb, 1998). <sup>[25]</sup> Sometimes sexually suggestive images or content in advertising campaigns trigger protests from those with religious or moral objections, often creating a payoff of far more publicity for the product than was generated by the ad itself. Examples of this include, in 2010, South African officials banning the international AXE Excite’s “Even angels will fall” ad or, in the early 2000s, protests of print catalogs of clothing retailer Abercrombie & Fitch. Calvin Klein became a billion-dollar brand in part because of the then-pioneering billboards showing handsome young men in tight underwear, which started in 1983 at a time when billboards in Western countries were more likely to only objectify women (even though film had objectified men for many decades; Ferguson, 2004). <sup>[26]</sup>

A final controversy regarding sexual objectification involves the sexualization of children and adolescents. In a qualitative analysis of a small number of child beauty pageant participants and their parents, Pannell (2007) <sup>[27]</sup> found that traditional notions of beauty and femininity played a significant role in this U.S. subculture. Such pageants have been critiqued for “stealing” childhood innocence, although as Giroux noted (1998), <sup>[28]</sup> such concerns are partly based on a mythology that childhood is indeed a time of innocence, which may itself be a Western invention of the recent past. While in all cultures there is a distinction between childhood and adulthood, historically cultures have varied widely in terms of expectations and roles assigned to children as well as the age at which “adult” roles and expectations begin (Gilmore, 1991). <sup>[29]</sup> Even among contemporary industrialized countries, the age of consent for sexual activity ranges from 13 to 18 years old, the legal age to purchase alcohol ranges from 16 to 21 years old, and the age at which one can begin driving ranges from 15 to 18 years old, with some countries such as the United States having variations within the same country, from state to state. We consider the broader philosophical implications of consent in [Chapter 4, Section 2 "Erotica, Pornography, and the Internet: Past, Present, and Future "](#), and we present research data on cognitive development as it related to sexual and reproductive health in [Chapter 10 "Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Parenthood"](#).

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- People may seek modification to their bodies for sexual enhancement or for more general reasons of perceiving such modifications as attractive and desirable. Many of these modifications are highly specific to culture and historical era and range from temporary, reversible changes such as shaving to more permanent modifications involving tattoos, piercings, and other changes to the body.
- Bodily modification has also included taking substances to enhance perceived sexual performance—actual pharmaceuticals as well as animal-based aphrodisiacs that have no value beyond their placebo effects. Poaching of endangered species for aphrodisiacs continues to be problematic.
- Elective surgeries are also sometimes used for cosmetic enhancement in both sexes and increasingly for modifying the appearance of the genitalia and/or secondary sexual characteristics, such as breasts and muscles.
- Some of these surgeries have more potential for complications than others, and many have been critiqued as unnecessary and contributing to dysfunction by raising levels of dissatisfaction with typical body variations.
- The desirability of cosmetic surgery varies by culture. It tends to be more common for females than for males. Most individuals who have such surgeries are satisfied, despite rates of failure or complications that can exceed 50%.
- Historically, women have been sexually objectified more than men, but increasingly in industrialized countries, both sexes are objectified. Some object to objectification on moral or philosophical grounds or based on concerns of sexism, while others do not find it objectionable.
- Media consumption measurably affects body image, and in a subset of people, distorted body image can relate to psychological disorders.

## 4.2 Erotica, Pornography, and the Internet: Past, Present, and Future

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Outline the artistic and legal history of porn and its current role in people's lives.
2. Describe empirical research on pornography, including potential for harm and perhaps the avoidance of harm.

*In practice, attempts to sort out good erotica from bad porn inevitably come down to “What turns me on is erotic; what turns you on is pornographic.”<sup>[1]</sup>*

*Ellen Willis (1979 / 2009)*

*U.S. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart in concurring with the majority U.S. Supreme Court that the 1958 French film *Les Amants* (The Lovers) was not obscene:*

*“I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description, and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But I know it when I see it, and the motion picture involved in this case is not that.”<sup>[2]</sup>*

*Jacobellis v. Ohio (1964)*

## **Erotica from 35,000 B.C.E. to Today**

*Representations of people and sexual acts in literature, art, photography, and video for the purposes of sexual pleasure of the recipient* are referred to as erotica, erotic, pornography, or porn. The term *erotic*, or *erotica*, generally suggests a positive or approving connotation, whereas the word *porn* historically conveyed a negative association. The word *obscene*, as applied to material of a sexual nature, *suggests that the material is inappropriate and that access to it should have restrictions*.

Figurative objects that have some explicit sexual aspect predate the invention of agriculture. The oldest such object has been dated to being more than 35,000 years old and is a small statue carved from mammoth ivory that is barely larger than a person's thumb. It portrays a human with enlarged breasts and a clearly visible, disproportionately large vulva, leading its discoverer and other archeologists to conclude that it had sexual connotations. [Figure 4.3 "Prephotography Erotic Art"](#) shows this and more recent erotic art. Ancient phalluses have also been found. In cultures for which documentation exists, such sculptures are at times used for private sexual excitement and enjoyment, and at other times some are used in a public ceremonial context, frequently as part of a ceremony representing fertility. An example of ritualistic use is the Kanamara festival, today still held at the Wakamiya Hachimangu Shrine, a Shinto temple in the city of Kawasaki, Japan, where once a year there is a multiday festival with penis sculptures and a parade led by a Shinto priest in which a crowd carries a wooden phallus that is 3 m (10 feet) long to the shrine.

Representations of the body, parts of sexual anatomy, and people engaging in sexual behavior also appear in ancient art in a manner that clearly was intended for sexual arousal and stimulation in the viewer. For example, in Japan, erotic art portraying nudity and sexual behavior was common until being banned during U.S. occupation after World War II. Erotic frescoes adorned the walls of brothels in ancient Pompeii, and wooden dildos were described in the Kama Sutra for use by upper-caste Indians. Even when used in the ceremonial fertility context, there can still be an aspect of personal sexual stimulation. For example, in the Kanamara festival, wearing a phallus, participating in the parade, and touching the phallus at the shrine is believed to enhance one's sexual vigor for later sexual encounters.

*Figure 4.3 Prephotography Erotic Art* <sup>[3]</sup>





*In the upper row: a figurine dated to 35,000 B.C.E. found by Nicholas J. Conard in Germany in 2008 which shows greatly exaggerated breasts, and, perhaps, served as a fertility charm. It is one of the oldest figurative art objects yet discovered that contains (apparently) erotic or sexual content. In the middle row (left to right): an erotic oil lamp from a brothel in Pompeii dated to the first century; a section of a Japanese scroll which is an example of Shunga from the Edo period in the 1600s to 1800s (Shunga was a genre of erotic art in Japan seen during and before the Edo period). In the lower row (left to right): another example of Shunga from 1799; a more recent (1800s) Indian illustration of a scene from the ancient Kama Sutra.*

Portrayals of the naked body may also be done for artistic style with incidental sexual content or no sexual content. As we discuss in [Chapter 11, Section 3 "Nonconsenting Paraphilias and Pedophilia"](#), in the context of exploring the differences between exhibitionism, naturalism, and public nudity, in ancient Greece and Rome, the body was often portrayed naked in art, some of which was clearly intended for erotic stimulation (such as frescoes in brothels) and some of which was simply a common decorative representation of the era (Grossman, 2003; Stewart, 2011). <sup>[4] [5]</sup> Furthermore, in the original Greek Olympics, male athletes performed naked. The portrayal of nudity in Greek sculpture and Roman painting influenced the style of painting and sculpture in the early Renaissance in Europe, and portrayals of nudity were common in Western art. In some eras and regions in India, temple art has included explicit representations of sexual activity—most famously, sexually explicit sculptures on the exterior walls of Hindu and Jain temples in the city of Khajuraho, some of which portray human-human as well as human-animal sex.

Many authors have noted that as new technologies have been invented, these technologies have often been utilized to portray erotica or pornography (e.g., Nathan, 2007; Attwood, 2009). <sup>[6] [7]</sup> Hand-painted scrolls in ancient Rome and Japan were used not only for literature but also for distributing erotic images to those who could afford them. When the printing press was invented, some woodcut illustrations were of naked women or mermaids. And when mass production of books became possible in the 1800s, some of the most successful titles were those that had sexualized content, with copies selling well beyond their ostensibly scientific audience, such as Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*, describing paraphilias in very specific detail. Some of the earliest uses of still photography and, later, film were for the production and distribution of erotica, as was true of early home video-recording equipment (VHS and Betamax tape). Long before the Internet and the ability to stream video porn, an early precursor of the Internet—text-only Usenet discussion groups—was also used to distribute erotic photographs organized by type of porn, using software to convert images to the ASCII-text



characters that Usenet was limited to. Indeed, today, while pornographic websites are not among the top 50 most-frequented sites on the Internet, several are in the top 100 (Alexa.com, n.d.).<sup>[8]</sup> Although many popular and some scholarly sources have reported that a substantial portion of Internet traffic is for pornography (from 40% to 80%; Paasonen, 2011),<sup>[9]</sup> technology sites estimate that, at most, 30% of Internet bandwidth is used for pornography (Anthony, 2012).<sup>[10]</sup>

## **The Law: Art, Porn, and Free Speech**

Next we examine both the recent history and the philosophy of attempts to restrict material that may be viewed by some to be of a sexual nature. We say “by some” because more than 500 years of formal efforts in Western countries to legally restrict such materials have shown that it is difficult to define what is obscene, and what is seen as innocuous in one country at a particular time may be illegal in that very country and at that very time, depending on the context. For example, in the United States in 2012, if you upload a video of yourself masturbating to pornhub.com, it’s fairly clear that you intend for this to be used in a sexual context. As long as you are over the age of 18 and the website requires viewers to assert that they are over the age of 18, this action is protected under free-speech rights in the United States. But if you e-mailed the video directly to a person who turned out to be 14 years old, and there is evidence that you knew or reasonably should have known that the person was 14 years old, this would be considered a criminal sex offense. In the industrialized city-state of Singapore, one of the world’s most high-tech affluent economies, possession or distribution of physical objects containing sexually explicit images was against the law in 2012 (including magazines and DVDs), but in the same year, the private viewing of such videos from the Internet was not deemed to be a violation (Singapore Government Media Development Authority, 2012).<sup>[11]</sup>

Compared with more recent religious traditions, the more traditional interpretations of the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) have traditionally held negative views of sexuality and sexual pleasure outside of a male-female marriage. In some traditions, such as the writings of St. Augustine of Hippo in the 400s, all sexuality was viewed as impure, even in a male-female marriage. While the naked body was portrayed in a nonsexual manner in art in the Renaissance, particularly in the 1400s and 1500s, the Protestant Reformation encouraged a more restrained, less opulent expression, and the Catholic Church’s response via the Council of Trent in the 1550s and 1560s led to a banning of nude portrayals of the body in art in Europe. We detail this in [Chapter 1, Section 4.3 "Culture and the Phallus"](#), but briefly, it led to a centuries-long effort by successive popes to remove nudity from the Church’s large collection of visual art, including, most famously,

repainting portions of the Sistine Chapel to cover genitalia as well as applying fig leaves to cover genitalia on statues in the Vatican (Cawthorne, 2004; Council of Trent, 1564/1848; Perrottet, 2011). <sup>[12] [13] [14]</sup>

This history heavily influenced the passage of antiobscenity laws in the 1800s in Europe, the United States, and parts of the world colonized by Europe, such as British-ruled India. In the United States, most states had laws restricting the distribution of sexually explicit materials. As we explore in greater detail in [Chapter 9 "Fertility, Contraception, and Abortion"](#), at the national level in the United States, the Comstock Act in 1873 made mailing any sexually explicit materials illegal, including those with information on contraception. These prohibitions on distributing information on contraception were struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court, first for married couples in 1965 with *Griswold v. Connecticut* and then for all people in 1972 with *Eisenstadt v. Baird*, but these cases did not strike down restrictions on erotica and pornography—only restrictions on information on contraception and, by implication, sexual health and reproduction.

The legalization of pornography and erotica has had a much more complicated legal history, with some materials continuing to be illegal in many countries. Many democracies that have legally prohibited pornography have experienced legal conflicts between the apparent will of the majority to restrict pornography, expressed through politicians in laws, and laws or constitutions that protect individual freedom of speech and artistic expression. In most democracies, the courts adjudicate such conflicts, and material in one era that is obviously obscene is often commonplace in another era, so there are literally hundreds of cases in many countries. We focus on several notable cases in the United States and other countries that illustrate significant changes.

While obscene material had been generally considered illegal and was disapproved of by the Catholic Church from the mid-1500s, in the 1800s many Western nations passed formal laws banning material that was obscene or that might “corrupt” the public, such as the Obscene Publications Act of 1857 in the United Kingdom or the Comstock Act of 1873 in the United States. In the 1800s and 1900s, many novels with sexual content, some of which are now considered to be great literary works, were written and subsequently came to be banned in Western countries under such laws. For example, James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, serialized in the United States, was determined to be obscene in 1921 in the United States and was banned until a district court overruled the decision in 1933 (but it was permitted in Europe). The ruling was not based on a free-speech right but instead on the fact that the novel itself was not obscene, so it continued to be legal to ban stories without literary merit that were obscene. In England, D. H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, published in 1928, was likewise

banned and was not legally published in the United Kingdom until 1960, many decades after Lawrence's death. The 1960 case in England was one of the first tests of a 1959 law called the Obscene Publications Act, which updated the almost century-old law but made an exception for works with literary merit. Changes in customs sometimes are not matched by changes in laws. For example, in the United Kingdom (as of the 2000s), frontal nudity on taxpayer-supported television programs is common, all consensual sexual acts between adults are permitted by law, and sex work (prostitution) is not a crime. However, in 2009, a gay male sex worker was arrested for selling DVDs of bondage, fisting, and urine play on the grounds that selling these materials was illegal under the 1959 obscenity law. In the 1950s, such behaviors were also illegal. The defendant, Michael Peacock, was found innocent by a jury in 2012, who found that the material would not corrupt the public and would likely only be watched by people who already enjoyed such things. Although Britain has no single written constitution, its highest courts can strike down laws; however, this particular case was not appealed to a higher court, so the acquittal does not affect the validity of the 1959 law, which technically remains in effect, with other prosecutions for selling videos of legal sexual acts continuing under the old law (Beaumont & Hodgson, 2012). <sup>[15]</sup>

In the United States, one of the first tests of obscene materials in the post–World War II era was the 1957 case of *Roth v. United States*. Samuel Roth had been convicted of distributing a quarterly magazine that had erotic stories and nude photographs. The case was eventually appealed to the Supreme Court, which held in a 6–3 decision that it was legal to ban pornography and that the material Roth distributed was obscene. The majority opinion, however, indicated that a stricter test was needed than the prevailing standard based on corrupting the public (which dated to an 1868 English case). The standard for judging obscenity “is whether, to the average person, applying contemporary community standards, the dominant theme of the material, taken as a whole, appeals to prurient interest” (*Roth v. United States*, 1957, p. 489). <sup>[16]</sup> This was the standard applied in a case a few years later involving the 1958 French film, *Les Amants* (The Lovers). A box office hit in France and a winner of several prizes, it was shown in the United States in 1959. The film contains a love scene of approximately 6 minutes that is suggestive of a couple having sex. The couple is shown kissing, their arms are shown, and their faces are in apparent ecstasy. There is no portrayal of breasts or genitalia, and the scene is less explicit than U.S. broadcast daytime television in 2012. However, at the time, it was quite controversial, both for the images that were more graphic than typical of the era and for the fact that the woman was portrayed as married and as having sex with someone other than her husband. Nico Jacobellis, the manager of a cinema in Cleveland

Heights, Ohio, was arrested and convicted for showing the film, and eventually the case made its way to the Supreme Court. In a 1964 decision, the court reaffirmed that individual states and towns could impose community standards and restrict obscene material and that obscenity was not protected as a First Amendment right to free speech, but the majority held that the film in question was not obscene by the Roth standard. The next famous U.S. case was that of Marvin Miller, a successful California distributor of sexually explicit material. By the 1970s, numerous pornographic magazines were widely distributed by mail in the United States, with many lawsuits being brought by local jurisdictions against booksellers, theaters, video stores, and others. In a 5-4 decision, the Supreme Court again upheld that obscene materials can be banned and furthermore that local “community standards” may be used for local laws. The definition of *obscenity* was further narrowed such that the work had to lack “serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value” (*Miller v. California*, 1973, p. 24).<sup>[17]</sup> This same standard applies today in the United States. Although changing community standards means that convictions are increasingly rare, they can still occur, including at the federal level. The most recent prominent conviction was of a California couple who distributed Internet porn that was downloaded in rural Pennsylvania. The case began with a 2002 documentary on extreme pornography, where the couple was shown making videos that simulated rape. With the coordination of federal prosecutors, the couple was tried in a federal court in Pennsylvania under federal antiobscenity statutes, based on the fact that the videos could be downloaded in Pennsylvania and thus obscene materials had been transported across state lines. They fought the case with multiple appeals and reversals and with the U.S. Supreme Court declining to hear the case, and in 2009, when they ran out of money, they entered a plea bargain.

The final case we consider, *U.S. v. Stevens*, involves a 2010 decision that is only tangentially related to pornography. In most jurisdictions in the United States, animal cruelty laws prevent causing undue pain to animals. A market at one point existed for “crush” videos showing animals being squashed, which were viewed by people who find this sexually arousing. The existence of this market led to a 1999 law banning such videos, and any videos that showed any animal cruelty, from being sold. Robert Stevens of Pittsville, Virginia, did not make crush videos but ran a video business selling videos of pit bull dogfights. Although he didn’t make crush videos, he was prosecuted under the federal law prohibiting crush films. The case eventually was heard by the Supreme Court, which ruled 8-0 that the law was unconstitutional, because it restricted free speech, and that while the government could prohibit animal cruelty, making videos of it and selling them were protected. Interestingly, Chief Justice Roberts wrote that a law prohibiting crush videos made as pornography might be

valid but that the federal law was written too broadly and as written could ban videos of animals being hunted, which was protected as free speech. This suggests that the present court appears inclined to continue the 1973 Miller definitions well into the future with regard to pornography, even in an era when it has been expanding First Amendment protections of nonpornographic speech (such as the videos made by Robert Stevens).

### **Scholarly Research on Pornography**

Although legal definitions of pornography include written materials, research has focused on visual pornography, beginning with the widespread availability of high-quality images in erotic magazines and more recently including video materials, such as erotica distributed via high-speed Internet connections. The studies broadly fall into three categories: (1) controlled studies in which volunteers are either exposed to pornographic images or not, measuring the effects of such exposure on behavior, mood, and/or attitudes; (2) correlational studies that look at the correlations between self-reports of real-life use of pornography and measures such as attitudes, relationship satisfaction, or the presence or absence of reported disorders; and (3) large-scale studies that compare otherwise-similar countries that have different laws on the availability of pornography or that focus on a particular country where there was a sudden change in law, identifying the subsequent effects on rates of crimes. As one would expect, these are very different types of measures and yield quite different results.

We focus on research from each category and then offer a synthesis. First, we do this in terms of the effects measured from studies of controlled exposure to pornography. Researchers have been particularly interested in whether pornography leads to an objectification of women and whether “extreme” pornography that portrays violence leads to any negative impact or plays an association in actual violence toward women. The latter has received particular attention in many countries, such as the U.S. law previously described that attempted to ban squash porn (but was struck down by the Supreme Court) and a 2008 British law that banned not only the production but also the viewing of “extreme pornography” that portrayed simulated intercourse with a human corpse, simulated severe injury, or sex with an animal (Summers, 2008). <sup>[18]</sup> As in many such cases, the British law was passed after a single well-publicized case in which a female was assaulted and killed by a male who had viewed extreme pornography.

A large meta-analysis of experimental studies was conducted in 1995 by Allen, D’Alessio, and Brezgel (1995). <sup>[19]</sup> They found a consistent pattern in that exposure to nudity reduced subsequent aggression, exposure to nonviolent sexual activity increased subsequent aggression to some degree, and exposure to violent sexual activity increased aggression the most. Similar studies have led some authors, such as Flood, to conclude that

“while children and young people are sexual beings and deserve age-appropriate materials on sex and sexuality, pornography is a poor, and indeed dangerous, sex educator” (2009, p. 384).<sup>[20]</sup>

However, another meta-analysis of actual use of pornography that was also conducted in 1995 (Allen, Emmers, Gebhardt, & Giery, 1995)<sup>[21]</sup> showed essentially no relationship between actual self-reports of pornography use and acceptance of myths about rape (such beliefs have been associated in other studies with actual violence against women). Again, similar more recent studies have since shown similar absence of effects in terms of actual self-reports of use. Malamuth, Hald, and Koss (2011),<sup>[22]</sup> reporting on both earlier meta-analyses and a population-based study, found that correlations were explained by individual differences. In other words, the relationship between use of pornography and negative attitudes toward women was primarily found only in a subset of men who were at high risk for sexual aggression. They suggested that pornography exposure may only be risky for those men or that the preexisting interests of those men may have resulted in heightened use of pornography. Arakawa, Flanders, and Hatfield (2012)<sup>[23]</sup> found that while disempowering images were similar in Norway, the United States, and Japan, empowering images were more often depicted in Norway than in the United States and least often in Japan, mirroring the U.N. Gender Empowerment Measures for women for these three countries (of the three countries, Norway has the most women in positions of power, then the United States, and Japan has the least).

Pornography has also been implicated in sexual dysfunction. For example, the website [yourbrainonporn.com](http://yourbrainonporn.com) lists many anecdotal reports of young males who are experiencing loss of interest in sex with a partner, erectile dysfunction (ED), and/or difficulties having an orgasm, all as a result of watching high-speed Internet porn and who are reportedly cured after giving up viewing pornography or giving up masturbating to pornography. One of the people who maintains [yourbrainonporn.com](http://yourbrainonporn.com) also has a blog on the pop-psychology website *Psychology Today*, arguing that porn “rewires” the brain, especially among adolescent males, in a way that adversely affects partnered sexual activity and sexual performance. The site also links primarily to media reports of similar phenomena as well as to “sexual addiction treatment” specialists who suggest that Internet porn in particular can lead to addiction. Of course, there are also many online reports of people sincerely believing that they have been abducted and anally probed by aliens who, despite having faster-than-light spacecraft, have faulty memory-wiping technology.

Unlike alien abductions, the concerns about adolescents and Internet pornography sound potentially plausible at first, as adolescence is a time of development, and many countries that permit pornography have historically



restricted the sale of such materials to adults. The Internet has made it possible for adolescents, who previously could not easily access such materials, to have essentially unlimited access. However, the data show that the effects are at most minimal and limited to a subset of people who may have already had problems with addictive or compulsive behavior. Population-based research on pornography consumption and sexual dysfunction is more limited than the research on pornography and attitudes, but those studies that do exist find few strong results. Svedin, Åkerman, and Priebe (2011) <sup>[24]</sup> found in a population-based national study of more than 2,000 Swedish adolescents that the most frequent users of pornography (top 10.5%) were more likely to live in large cities, use alcohol more, and have greater sexual desire and were more likely to have engaged in selling sexual services than were others, but the vast majority had no effects. A qualitative study among a small group of Swedish teenagers found that teenagers felt that pornography showed males as being more dominant sexually than females and that this presented a distorted reality—but they also reported using pornography for knowledge about sexuality (Mattebo, Larsson, Tydén, Olsson, & Häggström-Nordin, 2012). <sup>[25]</sup>

Most studies find that pornography use is higher in males than in females, particularly among adolescents. In the United States, only 5% of self-identified pornography-seeking children and adolescents (between the ages of 10 and 17) were female (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2005). <sup>[26]</sup> These authors found that those with highest exposure to all types of pornography (Internet and nonInternet) were more likely to report delinquent behavior and substance use. As we detail in [Chapter 7 "Sexual Behavior Across Cultures"](#), pornography use is more equal between the sexes among young adults, but there are between-country differences. In Finland, the sex ratio of adult pornography users is more nearly equal (Kontula, 2009). <sup>[27]</sup> In contrast to the U.S. findings on adolescents, Luder et al. (2011) <sup>[28]</sup> concluded that there was no overall association between risky behaviors and pornography use. They did find some individual differences among those who sought out pornography, such as higher levels of sensation seeking (for both sexes) and being less likely to use a condom upon last intercourse (for males).

Despite the alleged dangers espoused by Internet porn–addiction websites, particularly in terms of negative effects on people in relationships, there have been few population-based representative samples of pornography use in adults in coupled relationships. In one such study, Daneback, Træen, and Månsson (2009) <sup>[29]</sup> found that pornography use was associated in males with heightened erectile functioning in their relationships, not reduced functioning after adjusting for age-related changes. The majority of couples (77%) did not report that use of pornography heightened their sex life; rather, it was primarily used for personal pleasure. Pornography

was reported as being used to improve coupled relationships by both partners in the couple in 15% of respondents, with reported rates of 3% of just the female doing this and 5% of just the male doing this. Among couples where only one partner used pornography, there was a heightened incidence of arousal problems in males and of negative self-perception in females, but this was not the case where both partners used pornography. Pornography use overall was associated with more permissive attitudes toward sexuality. It is also worth noting that the largest population-based survey to date of all types of adolescent problematic Internet use across 10 European countries and Israel found very low rates of pathological Internet use—5.2% in males and 3.8% in females (4.4% averaging across both sexes; Durkee et al., 2012).<sup>[30]</sup> Adolescents lacking emotional and psychological support were most at risk for pathological or maladaptive Internet use.

While few population-based studies exist specific to pornography, there are studies that have used convenience samples and have found some relationships between pornography use and specific problems. Some find problems, and some do not. An Australian study widely reported in the international media but not yet published in peer-reviewed journals (The University of Sydney, 2012)<sup>[31]</sup> found that 20% of porn users preferred pornography to sex with a partner and that 30% experienced work performance suffering due to excessive viewing. Other studies have found few problems among online pornography viewers (as noted earlier, population-based studies of all problematic Internet use show low base rates of problems). For example, an online survey of 650 young Croatian men between the ages of 18 and 25 found that there were small positive and negative effects from use of online pornography. The strongest finding was that early use of pornography (at the age of 14) had no effects for those who had used mainstream pornography, but there were small negative effects in sexual satisfaction and suppression of intimacy for early users of paraphilic sexually explicit material (Štulhofer, Buško, & Landripet, 2010).<sup>[32]</sup> As noted in [Chapter 11 "Variations in Sexual Behavior: Kinks, Fetishes, and Paraphilias"](#), older studies, before the Internet existed, where early adolescent exposure to paraphilic pornography was less easy, have also shown a relationship between paraphilias and relationship intimacy, so the phenomenon is not unique to the Internet era. As we suggested in [Chapter 6 "Sexual Difficulties, Dysfunctions, and Treatments"](#), this may be due to several factors: an imbalance in partners with paraphilic interests in heterosexual populations leading to sexual compatibility issues, the narrowness of arousal patterns in some individuals with kinks and fetishes leading to difficulties in nonparaphilic sexual activity, and partner attitudes toward kinks and fetishes and accommodating them.

In terms of online pornography addiction, a convenience sample of Internet users in Sweden found low levels of problems (5% for females, 13% for males; and for serious problems, 2% for females and 5% for males; Ross, Månsson, & Daneback, 2012).<sup>[33]</sup> A study contrasting college students in Peru and the United States found that Peruvians used the Internet more than those in the United States for viewing sexually explicit materials but that both groups had a relatively low number of hours per week and that there were no differences in adjustment between those who had online sexual activity and those who did not (Velezmoro, Negy, & Livia, 2012).<sup>[34]</sup> Self-reporting from Danish adults revealed that pornography use was generally associated with favorable outcomes and both positive and negative effects, with positives outweighing negatives (Hald & Malamuth, 2008).<sup>[35]</sup> Correlations have been found between certain types of pornography use and certain types of consensual but risky sexual behavior. Stein, Silvera, Hagerty, and Marmor (2012)<sup>[36]</sup> found that among nonmonogamous men having sex with multiple male partners, unprotected anal intercourse (UAI) was higher in those males who watched pornography portraying UAI. Moore and Weissbein (2010)<sup>[37]</sup> suggested that pornography affects gender roles and colorfully compared the bursts of water fountains in public parks to male ejaculate and a focus on sexual pleasure of males without regard to female pleasure, epitomized in pornography by the prevalence of the “money shot” focusing on a male ejaculating. Morgan (2011)<sup>[38]</sup> found that frequency of using sexually explicit materials was associated with preferences for activities presented in sexually explicit materials, and higher rates of use were associated with more sexual experience as well as less relationship satisfaction. The associations were highly statistically significant for many variables but fairly weak for both sexes (ranging from  $-.155$  to  $.356$ , accounting for 12% of the variance), with the exception being in females only in regard to preference for kinky sex. The preference for kinky sex had a  $.522$  correlation with frequency of viewing sexually explicit materials and a  $.411$  correlation with types of erotic material used (although correlation does not necessarily equal causation). Although Morgan concluded that materials may shape interests, given that females overall were much less likely than males to have ever viewed sexually explicit materials and that computer access was similar between the sexes in her sample, one could equally conclude that kinky females are more likely to seek out kinky sexually explicit materials rather than kinky materials having made a subset of females kinky. To date, no one has studied whether pornography causally affects the frequency of particular sexual behaviors; however, as we detail in [Chapter 7 "Sexual Behavior Across Cultures"](#), the frequency of some behaviors such as oral sex is more common than in the past, suggesting that knowledge about sexual activities does affect frequency of behaviors.

## Pornography, Violence, and Sexual Offending

From a legal perspective, the most salient aspect of pornography is whether “in the real world” it has any of the claimed negative effects that are the basis for secular prohibitions or restrictions on pornography. As the cliché goes, correlation does not equal causation. Likewise, the absence of a correlation does not mean no effect, as sometimes a third factor can be countering a causal influence. However, the absence of correlation between two variables, with no clear opposing factors present, makes strong causation highly unlikely. Although special concerns have been raised about “hard-core” extreme or violent pornography, Allen, D’Alessio and Emmers-Sommer (2000) <sup>[39]</sup> found that those who committed violent crimes against women did not have more pornography exposure than others. Kingston, Malamuth, Fedoroff, and Marshall (2009), <sup>[40]</sup> however, stress the role of individual differences, arguing that clear links exist between pornography use and sexually aggressive behavior in a subset of males who are at high risk on other factors that are associated with sexual aggression. Several real-world examples exist of countries that have had near total restrictions on pornography and then, after the fall of Soviet communism, sudden liberalization with dramatically increased access to pornography. The Czech Republic is a prominent example that has been studied (Diamond, Jozifkova, & Weiss, 2011a, 2011b). <sup>[41]</sup> <sup>[42]</sup> After a brief 1-year increase in reported cases of rape once the Soviet era had ended, the reports of rape returned to normal rates from before the pornography ban. The advent of the Internet has been identified as opening up access to more extreme forms of pornography, but reports of rape continued to decline slightly in the Czech Republic. In terms of third factors, if anything, nonsexual crime increased dramatically in the Czech Republic after communism fell (primarily physical assaults and robbery). Indeed, in most industrialized countries, rates of rape are lower in the postInternet era than in the preInternet era, so while not a randomly assigned experiment, the real-world data are opposite to the once-predicted increase in sexual violence from less-restricted access to pornography. Winick and Evans (1996) <sup>[43]</sup> noted that for various times between 1973 and 1986, four U.S. states had antipornography statutes that were not operational, permitting multiple within-country before-after comparisons, and found that there were no significant changes in sexual offenses, even though the operation of the law affected availability of pornography. Lastly, with regard to addiction, as we discuss in [Chapter 6 "Sexual Difficulties, Dysfunctions, and Treatments"](#), within-country rates of sexual dysfunctions adjusted for age have not changed substantially in the preInternet as opposed to postInternet era. The widespread availability of Internet pornography among adolescents would suggest that although some individuals may well have excessive use of the Internet (whether for online gaming or for pornography) and

may engage in compulsive or self-destructive behavior, it is no different from the baseline (preInternet) levels of problematic behaviors. An analogy might be watching television or reading books, as both are activities that can be over-engaged in but that can also be pleasurable and stimulate the reward centers of the brain. As noted, nonscholarly anti-Internet pornography sites claim that Internet pornography acts in a manner similar to psychoactive substances and/or creates sexual dysfunction, but the “evidence” they cite does not support this conclusion and is largely inferential or anecdotal. Controlled research has not been conducted. As noted earlier, population-based research on pornography use does show that Internet pornography use is now common in industrialized countries, and population-based surveys of sexual dysfunction (covered in [Chapter 13 "Sexually Transmitted Infections and Prevention"](#)) have not shown any sharp increases in dysfunction since the advent of the Internet.

Another critique of pornography is that the people who perform in erotic films, particularly women, are vulnerable or had a history of being sexually molested as children, and they are being exploited and victimized. This is known as the “damaged goods hypothesis.” In one of the few studies of this, Griffith, Mitchell, Hart, Adams, and Gu (2012) <sup>[44]</sup> found no such relationship. Women acting in pornography were not more likely to have experienced childhood sexual abuse, had higher levels of self-esteem and positive feelings than others, and reported greater sexual satisfaction. They were more likely to have used psychoactive drugs and to have had a higher number of sexual partners.

In most industrialized countries, pornography showing images of children engaged in sexual acts is illegal, including those cases where the images are simulated, such as paintings or computer-generated videos, and no actual children were involved in making the images. Selling, viewing, or sending such images to others is seen as contributing to a market for the exploitation of children, and even discussing the effects of such material makes many people uncomfortable. Kingston, Fedoroff, Firestone, Curry, and Bradford (2008) <sup>[45]</sup> found that use of deviant pornography was associated with higher rates of recidivism among convicted offenders (all types of aggression and pornography) and that use of deviant pornography for any group and use of any pornography for high-risk offenders were associated with repeat crimes. These authors classified pornography as *deviant* if it portrayed children, or if it contained violence among adults (although one would note that sexual aggression can occur in a consensual context, as in BDSM [i.e., bondage, domination/submission, sadism/masochism; see [Chapter 11, Section 1 "Sexual Diversity: Kinks and Fetishes"](#)]). In considering adult-minor sexual contact, pedophilia, and pornography, Weiss has suggested that some adults who are sexually attracted to children may

view such pornography without abusing children, and some who abuse children may be doing so as a substitute for desired sexual partners—not because of a pedophilic interest (Diamond, Jozifkova, & Weiss, 2011).<sup>[46]</sup> There is real-world evidence to suggest that may be the case. These authors noted that at different points in time, the legal status of child pornography changed in three countries: the Czech Republic, Japan, and Denmark. In all three countries, within-country rates of child sexual abuse were lower in periods where child pornography was not restricted, as compared with when it was restricted (Diamond, Jozifkova, & Weiss, 2011a, 2011b).<sup>[47]</sup><sup>[48]</sup> This is consistent with historical research showing no relationship between increasing availability of pornography and increasing rates of rape (Kutchinsky, 1991).<sup>[49]</sup> In Japan today, manga (comic art) portraying sexual situations with young adolescents is legal and represents a significant market (Tabuchi, 2011).<sup>[50]</sup>

## **Other Types of Erotica**

Once again, the Internet has greatly increased access to such material in the last 10 years. A popular genre of Internet-written erotica is “slash” fiction—fan-written fiction primarily read by heterosexual women portraying male-male sexual relationships among fictional characters who are heterosexual in the original form, such as Jacob/Edward (characters from a fictional book and film series called *Twilight*; read as “Jacob slash Edward”). Primarily qualitative analyses of slash fiction suggested that it is primarily, but not exclusively, enjoyed by heterosexual women (Salmon & Symons, 2004).<sup>[51]</sup> These authors suggested that male-male sexual encounters in slash fiction often contain a female heterosexual experience projected out onto male bodies. We note that all combinations of gender identity and sexual orientation (as well as kinks and fetishes) exist in the slash subgenres as well as in their readership. One of the most popular slash subgenres of the 2000s features Harry Potter characters (e.g., Harry/Draco or Harry/Snape; MacDonald, 2006).<sup>[52]</sup>

In some countries, child pornography laws extend to written descriptions, even of fictional characters, and given that the characters for most of the Harry Potter series are adolescents under the age of consent, the slash fiction genre might violate child pornography laws in some countries. In Canada, child pornography is illegal, including written material as well as visual representation that “advocates or counsels sexual activity with a person under the age of 18”; a court challenge that went to the Canadian Supreme Court upheld the law that a person could be tried, including for fictionalized material, although the court noted that it would only include cases where the activities were illegal under other sections of the Canadian Criminal Code and where the works had no artistic, educational, scientific, or medical purpose (e.g., as the Canadian age of consent for many types of sexual activity is less than 18 years old, the lower legal age would apply also to fictional portrayals of such



activities; Sharpe, 2001, p. 46). <sup>[53]</sup> The demand for simulated child sex is sufficient that some adult players of Second Life (an online virtual reality world) made money creating child avatars to have simulated sex with other players (Connolly, 2007). <sup>[54]</sup> Linden Labs, owner of Second Life, moved to ban such activity when it was discovered.

## **Sexting**

In the United States, the statutes against distributing sexual images of children or adolescents are written in such a way so as to include the consensual transmission of images by those under the age of 18 to one another (e.g., sexting), including in some states identifying adolescents as sex offenders for life under laws established to punish adults having sexual contact with children (McLaughlin, 2012). <sup>[55]</sup> Some legal scholars argue that some adolescent sexual speech would enjoy constitutional protections and that laws need to be revised in light of new technologies (McLaughlin, 2012). <sup>[56]</sup> A population-based study in the United States (Mitchell, Finkelhor, Jones, & Wolak, 2012) <sup>[57]</sup> suggested that the incidence of sexting by adolescents is quite low, with 7.1% of adolescents having received nude or nearly nude images of others, 5.9% having received sexually explicit images, and 2.5% having appeared in or created such images, lowering to 1% for those appearing in or creating images matching a legal definition of being sexually explicit (naked breasts, genitalia, or buttocks). In contrast, in college students, sexting is a relatively common occurrence (Drouin & Landgraff, 2012), <sup>[58]</sup> with some tendency to sext being more likely in young adults with attachment avoidance, particularly for males. Other authors have found a higher rate, with almost 20% of adolescents having sent a sexually explicit text and over 25% having forwarded one to friends (Strassberg, McKinnon, Susaíta, & Rullo). <sup>[59]</sup> Almost two-thirds of the adolescents in this sample were unaware that this could cause legal or other consequences. We note that recent reports discuss “cell phone safety,” and while such behavior may be problematic legally, it should be contextualized in light of the fact that sexual behavior is not unusual during adolescence (as covered in [Chapter 7 "Sexual Behavior Across Cultures"](#) and [Chapter 8 "Gender and Sexuality Across the Lifespan"](#)) and that sexting obviously would have no risk of STIs or pregnancy.

Movie ratings also represent an attempt to restrict access to certain materials by age to adults or older adolescents. In the United States, restricted material includes graphic violence, swearing, frontal nudity, urination or defecation, and sexual activity. A comparison of film rating standards worldwide shows substantial differences in regard to what materials are considered age appropriate, reflecting varying community standards in terms of what is thought to be sexually explicit or violent. For example, as of 2012 in the United Kingdom,

frontal nudity has been shown in the evenings on taxpayer-supported broadcast television as well as on commercial television (male and female, but not showing male erection). In the United States in the same year, this is illegal on broadcast or cable television and would result in a fine but is permitted on premium subscription-only television such as HBO.

## **The Sext Seen Around the World: You Could Get Fired, Too**

While sexting may be a typical application of new technologies to age-old behaviors of flirting, dating, and relationships, it is worth noting that electronic media make it possible for previously private behavior to become public, creating career difficulties for some individuals, particularly politicians. In 2011, Anthony Weiner, a popular representative to the U.S. Congress from New York, accidentally sent a faceless picture of himself wearing underwear with an erection to his 45,000 Twitter followers, intending to send it instead to a woman he had been flirting with via private text messages. Weiner, who was married to someone else, at first claimed that his computer account had been hacked. As Wypijewski noted (2011), <sup>[60]</sup> sexual acts by politicians are often seen as “perversions” and are particularly effective targets for political satirists. Some politicians have survived sex scandals, while others have not (Weiner resigned), but the case illustrates how legal but disfavored behavior can become problematic when amplified by the Internet. Numerous cases that are less high profile exist of people being fired from jobs for having been discovered via online evidence to have engaged in legally protected sexual behavior, such as being in online pornography or posting suggestive photographs on Facebook. While such sexual activities are legally protected, in the United States, private employers are typically “at-will” employers who may fire workers at will, including for certain types of private behavior that the employee may have engaged in (even if it predates their being hired). Although freedom of religious expression is protected, other types of speech may be valid grounds for firing, including political beliefs, humor, and sexual activity. Privacy and employment laws in Europe are quite different, often requiring employers to have cause for firing a worker, with that cause needing to relate directly to job performance (the same need for cause also applies for certain union workers in the United States).

## **Sex and Brain Differences in Pornography Use**

We briefly cover the use of erotic materials in [Chapter 7 "Sexual Behavior Across Cultures"](#). Large-scale studies and meta-analyses have shown that males report higher prevalence of pornography use than do females and are also more likely to be aroused by visual pornography (Petersen & Hyde, 2011). <sup>[61]</sup> Peterson and Hyde suggested that although women may underreport pornography use, the sex difference in pornography use is one of the

largest sex differences found in sexual behavior (an effect size of about 0.63, which is less than one standard deviation). They concluded that this difference may have both cultural and biological causes. In addition, it may affect partnered sexual experiences, as masturbatory style and technique can affect expectations about partnered sex as well as the pattern of one's sexual arousal and orgasmic responses (we covered the latter in [Chapter 6 "Sexual Difficulties, Dysfunctions, and Treatments"](#)). Here we focus in greater detail on other differences between the sexes regarding pornography.

Qualitative analyses suggest that females may prefer different types of pornography. For example, in 2012, a popular porn star with young females is James Deen (Vega & Przygoda, 2012a).<sup>[62]</sup> Deen is described as having a “dashing boy-next-door” appearance (Vega & Przygoda, 2012b).<sup>[63]</sup> In 2011 and 2012, the soft-core BDSM erotic novel *Fifty Shades of Grey* and its sequels sold more than 10 million copies in fewer than 2 years—a record at the time for what was initially a self-published novel. Widely critiqued as having particularly poor writing, the novel originated in fan fiction based loosely on the *Twilight* novels and was particularly popular with women. The market for erotic literature is much larger among females than males, just as the market for visual pornography is larger among males than females. Interestingly, females appear to respond physiologically to visual erotica in similar ways as males, so the preference for different types of erotica is not due to differences in physiological genital response to visual images (Stoléru, Fonteille, Cornélis, Joyal, & Moulrier, 2012).<sup>[64]</sup> Indeed, if anything, female sexual response to visually presented material is less specific than is male sexual response, with similar genital arousal in heterosexual females to both male and female stimuli and slight arousal to nonhuman (primate-primate) stimuli (Chivers & Bailey, 2005),<sup>[65]</sup> whereas heterosexual males showed greater arousal to female stimuli than to male stimuli and no arousal to nonhuman stimuli. For both sexes, subjective arousal matched stated sexual orientation.

While physiological genital response is similar, neurological response is different between the sexes. In a large meta-analysis of neurological imaging studies of sex differences in arousal and orgasm, Stoléru, Fonteille, Cornélis, Joyal, and Moulrier (2012)<sup>[66]</sup> found consistent results of differences in brain response in the sexes to a variety of sexual stimuli, including both auditory and visual stimuli. Although the studies were not about pornography but arousal and orgasm, most imaging studies used erotic stimuli as part of their experimental procedure. In particular, studies that used visual sexual stimuli showed that visual stimuli resulted in greater activation in the amygdala and thalamus in males than in females. These findings of neurological difference are associative; research has not yet determined if the sex-differentiated preference for visual material is due to

innate sex differences in neural activation, if the measured neural differences are due to different behavioral histories and cultural preferences for masturbating with visual material, if both of these are true, or if there are some other reasons that have not yet been discovered. Certain types of brain activation occurred in both sexes to visual sexual stimuli regardless of sexual orientation, and orgasm resulted in reduced activation in various brain regions for both sexes—particularly the prefrontal cortex for males.

### **Amateur and Professional Porn: Sex Work from a Distance?**

The term *sex work* typically refers to receiving money for having direct sexual contact with another person (i.e., prostitution, which we explore separately in [Chapter 4, Section 3 "Selling Sex: Strip Clubs, Prostitution, and Human Trafficking"](#)). Some people share sexually explicit photographs or videos of themselves at no charge via the Internet on amateur porn sites. Others earn money—for example, by selling videos of themselves masturbating or having sex or being hired to do so.

Before we discuss specific numbers, it is worth noting that numbers are often exaggerated in pornography. For example, *Deep Throat*, a 1972 pornographic film that was one of the first to have widespread distribution, is often claimed to have earned more than \$600 million in worldwide gross earnings, whereas in reality, court documents relating to obscenity trials suggest that its gross was perhaps \$30 million (Hiltzik, 2005). <sup>[67]</sup>

In the 1980s and 1990s, videotapes and then DVDs permitted the existence of a fairly robust pornography industry that collectively is estimated to have grossed several billion dollars a year, although each film typically only made a few tens of thousands of dollars. The pornography industry no longer is this lucrative, as amateur material given away for free as well as Internet pirating have resulted in dramatically reduced earnings. Fees for performers in 2012 are typically between \$600 and \$800 per film for a female and as little as \$150 per film for a male (Theroux, 2012). <sup>[68]</sup> Many pornography websites provide free clips on open-access sites and then charge subscription fees for additional materials. Another source of revenue are “cam” sites where people perform sexually via a live webcam link for a fee, but again, free sites are available where people who desire anonymous online encounters can connect with one another. Some people consider performers on such sites to be sex workers; others do not. Often the performers are located in developing economies, permitting greater profits for the website operators, whose customers may be in wealthier countries. Little reliable data exist on the revenues generated by such sites. Interestingly, one national study of all credit card receipts from one U.S. online adult entertainment provider showed that states that were more conservative and highly religious had higher rates of pornography consumption—even after adjusting for population size—than states that were more

liberal (Edelman, 2009).<sup>[69]</sup> The differences were not enormous, and there were some exceptions. There were 5.47 adult content subscribers per 1,000 high-speed Internet users in the highest-usage state, Utah, compared with 1.92 per 1,000 in the lowest-usage state, Montana (8 of the 10 top states were conservative, as assessed by votes in the 2008 presidential election). As noted, while appearing in adult pornography and being paid for it is legal in the United States, individuals can also legally be terminated from subsequent employment for a history of appearing in porn.

## **Legal Regulation of Other Types of Sexual Behavior**

Although it is typical to prefer privacy for sexual activity in most Western countries, there are a subset of people who enjoy having sex in nonprivate places. Reasons include the excitement of being discovered, violations of taboo, and an enjoyment of nature or open spaces. Such sex may be engaged in with a regular sexual partner or may be an anonymous encounter. We cover this in [Chapter 7 "Sexual Behavior Across Cultures"](#), but here we revisit the issue as it relates to regulating sexual activity. For some people, public sex in “cruising” areas (locations known as being places to initiate anonymous encounters) also serves the purpose of finding a sexual partner with little investment of time. In most Western countries, such activity is illegal and a potential sexual offense if caught. In Saudi Arabia, even kissing in public is a crime. A few Western countries have taken a tolerance policy of not prosecuting public sex areas; typically, the areas come to have a reputation as being places for meeting sexual partners, and then police or other authorities make a decision about the magnitude of enforcement of laws against such activity. In the United States in major cities, anecdotal reports suggest that raids and undercover police sting operations are performed when a park or restroom develops a reputation for cruising for sex (generally male-male sexual activity, usually in areas that are somewhat remote). In an area of Amsterdam’s Vondelpark, such activity is generally regarded as tolerated if performed discreetly, at night, away from paths where others walk (a very small subset of people engage in such activity). In England, public sex is popular enough with both females and males that scheduled events are advertised in advance on the Internet at roadside venues for all gender identities and sexual orientations, with the activity being referred to as “dogging” (Lyall, 2010).<sup>[70]</sup> No data exist on how commonly this occurs. While it is likely that media reports exaggerate the frequency, it is documented that such activity is appealing to some people and represents a type of sexual expression that some people enjoy that continues to be illegal in most countries.

As we cover in [Chapter 5 "Sexual Relationships, Love, and Communication"](#), there are likely evolutionary reasons for incest avoidance—in addition to strong cultural taboos. There are also secular reasons against intimate

relationships between siblings, including the greatly enhanced potential for psychological issues given the conflicting roles between intimate relationships (which can be dissolved) and family relationships (which generally endure for life). In addition, for male-female siblings who are fertile, there is the potential of genetic defects if they conceive. Nevertheless, there are periodically cases of siblings who fall in love with one another (both other-sex and same-sex) who argue that their behavior is among consenting adults and should be permitted. There have also been parent-child pairings. There is no empirical research on these types of relationships, but anecdotal reports document cases as well as legal challenges faced by people who seek to make such relationships legally recognized (Edemariam & Connolly, 2007). <sup>[71]</sup>

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- People have been using technology such as sculpture, drawing, and writing to make erotic representations for all of recorded history. The earliest prehistoric art also includes erotic sculpture, dating to more than 35,000 B.C.E. Some of the first uses for new technologies such as video recording and the Internet have been for distribution of sexually explicit material.
- In some cultures and contexts, sexually explicit materials can have a primarily artistic, ceremonial, ritualistic, or religious use or meaning, while in others, they may primarily be for sexual stimulation and pleasure. In others, they may have multiple meanings and uses.
- Modern laws in many countries regulate sexually explicit materials and nudity, placing restrictions on the age at which people may purchase them and/or regarding which materials are permitted. The origin of many of these laws in Western countries can be traced to the 1500s and the Catholic Church.
- Over the centuries following the 1500s, laws on erotica have been substantially modified as definitions of *artistic merit*, *erotica*, *pornography*, and *obscenity* have changed. Modifications to laws occur both by legislation and by court challenges. Since 2000, new laws continue to be made, restricting some classes of pornographic materials in the United Kingdom, the United States, Singapore, and many other industrialized countries. Although the Internet has made easy access to virtually unlimited pornography possible regardless of laws, some people are still prosecuted for producing or consuming such materials.
- Individual court cases show how societies that choose to regulate such materials often wrestle with defining what is artistic, erotic, or obscene.
- A secular justification for restricting such materials is that they cause harm. Alleged harm has included sexual dysfunctions, violence toward women, higher incidence of sexual crimes, and addiction. While short-term experimental research suggested a causal link, longer-term studies have not found this. Rather, access to pornography has been associated with decreased levels of sexual violence.
- Generally, small effects of pornography exposure may exist in terms of what types of sexual behavior people are aware of, and pornography has also been found to have beneficial effects in coupled relationships, particularly when used together by both partners.
- Sexting and use of the Internet for consensually sending images of oneself poses particular legal problems for adolescents in the United States, as laws predate such technologies. Research shows that such behavior is uncommon in younger adolescents and relatively common in young adult college students. Privacy and employment laws vary by country, and in many countries, including the United States, sexting and posting

sexually explicit images of oneself—even if done before being hired—can legally result in termination of employment, even for nonpublic individuals.

## 4.3 Selling Sex: Strip Clubs, Prostitution, and Human Trafficking

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Describe the spectrum of in-person selling of sexual activity, from strip clubs to prostitution.
2. Describe contemporary legal, ethical, and moral issues related to prostitution as well as different approaches.
3. Describe the research results on sex trafficking, including some myths surrounding its proliferation.

### A Spectrum of Selling In-Person Sex

You likely have heard the cliché “prostitution is the world’s oldest profession.” Although the evidence does support the idea that prostitution has existed for thousands of years, the cliché itself dates to Rudyard Kipling’s use of the phrase “ancient profession” in 1888 (indeed, *profession* itself was not commonly used as a word until the 20th century). When referring to *the receipt of money from someone for having sexual relations with that person*, we use both the terms prostitution and sex work. *Prostitute* presently has a more negative connotation than *sex worker*, but neither term has a particularly positive connotation in contemporary societies. Other synonyms for *prostitutes* relate to the amount of money earned: streetwalkers or hustlers represent the lowest paid, call girls and rent boys (adult men who have sex with other men) represent the next level, and escorts earn the most. Similar distinctions have existed in premodern societies. People who work in strip clubs and as exotic dancers usually do not consider themselves sex workers and are generally not prostitutes, but we include these professions here as part of a spectrum that includes an in-person commercial transaction with some intent for sexual stimulation on the part of the customer or client (as opposed to virtual or recorded interactions covered in [Chapter 4, Section 2 "Erotica, Pornography, and the Internet: Past, Present, and Future "](#), such as in pornography or via the Internet).

A significant factor in sex work of all types is gender imbalance, with the vast majority of clients being males and the vast majority of sex workers being females. This gender imbalance in sex work has historically been attributed to evolutionary sex differences; however, sex tourism where females from affluent countries visit developing economies for vacations with the expectation of paid romantic sexual encounters are starting to emerge, as we consider later. Just as pornography use is equalizing in highly industrialized economies, it is



possible that at least some part of the gender imbalance in prostitution is also a function of socialized gender roles and thus subject to future variation.

## **Strip Clubs**

Fine (2010)<sup>[1]</sup> observed that most strip clubs and establishments with “exotic dancers” in Western cities have female workers catering to male clients and that in the United Kingdom many of them explicitly market to corporate clients. She observed that in many countries, men involved in business and finance socialize together in such clubs after work, thus creating an exclusionary context that serves to make it difficult for women in the same businesses and companies to advance their careers. While empirical research suggests that sex imbalances exist in recreational use of strip clubs, strip clubs do exist that cater to female clients. Among young Danish tourists, 48% of males visited strip clubs as compared with 8% of females (Hesse & Tutenges, 2011).<sup>[2]</sup> Of males, 12.5% paid for sex during their holiday (almost half for the first time) as compared with 0% of women. Many strip clubs charge workers a fee for performing, and the workers then make their wages from tips and by performing lap dances (Price-Glynn, 2010).<sup>[3]</sup>

## **Sacred Sex Workers, Courtesans, and \$10,000-per-Night Escorts**

In multiple cultures from human antiquity, prostitutes have been documented as being affiliated with temples and places of worship. This includes in ancient Greece, India, and Babylonia (modern-day Iraq). Some historians suggest that these temple prostitutes were respected in a sacred manner and that sexual relations with them was an honor, related to ancient fertility rights, or that the temple sex workers, such as the Hetairae of ancient Greece, were highly educated and sought-after courtesans (Bell, 1994; Bryant & Elder, 2004).<sup>[4] [5]</sup> It has also been suggested that in Babylonia, virgin females were required to give up their virginity to males paying as part of a religious tradition (Hartland, 1907).<sup>[6]</sup> Other scholars have suggested that the idea of sacred prostitution was actually an invention of subsequent eras and that the ancient texts that make such references have been misunderstood (Budin, 2009).<sup>[7]</sup> We are inclined to believe that the interpretation of ancient temple sex workers as courtesans is most reasonable, as many patriarchal preindustrial cultures with elaborate monarchies or royalties (and where documentation is certain) have had such roles for women. For example, geishas in feudal Japan were highly educated women who would have sexual relations and provide companionship for men with money and status. Although their children would not inherit the wealth or title of the male, the geisha could accumulate considerable wealth to pass on to her children. European monarchs and lesser nobility also had courtesans, and monarchs in Islamic societies had harems where women had a similar

position. Like ancient Greece, all these societies were patriarchies with power and wealth passed along a male lineage and little opportunity for women who were thought to be inferior to men. Marriage would be arranged, and a wife would not necessarily be someone the husband would love or find to be a confidante or companion. As marriage to men of power was limited to the daughters of nobility or other women of power, women born outside of families of power often had little opportunity to advance themselves other than through the possibility of becoming a courtesan or geisha.

A similar concept to the courtesan Hetairae of ancient Greece existed in Southern India: that of the devadāsī—women who lived in matrilineal communities, were literate, and had sex with upper-caste men without marriage (Soneji, 2012).<sup>[8]</sup> During the colonial period, these practices were looked down upon. Although devadāsī exist today, they have a very different status than their ancient counterparts; they are generally looked down on as being low-paid prostitutes and today come from low-caste, poor families (Dalit women, or untouchables), or they are transgendered men who dedicate themselves to serve the goddess Yellamma (Soneji, 2012),<sup>[9]</sup> supporting themselves through prostitution.

This tradition of the “high-class” sex worker continues to some extent in modern industrialized societies with high-end escort services, where males may pay \$10,000 or more for an evening of companionship with a highly educated female sex worker, who is typically young, unattached, and may have only a small number of clients. Unverified stories routinely appear in the media of affluent businessmen flying high-class escorts on private jets to help them shop for a weekend mansion or of invitation-only sex parties with older, affluent, powerful men and multiple young escorts. While no research or documentation exists on how common such escorts are, periodically a politician becomes implicated in a prostitution scandal, and documentation is produced that shows that such high-end sex work does indeed exist. An example of this is the case of Eliot Spitzer, who was inaugurated as governor of the state of New York in 2007. Born into inherited wealth, he had built a reputation in earlier years as a tough attorney general, in part for prosecuting organized prostitution rings as well as securities fraud, and some in the media speculated that one day he might run for president of the United States. Suspicious money transfers led federal officials to investigate him, and they found that he was sending money across state lines to pay for escorts who charged more than \$1,000 per hour (thus committing multiple crimes). Although he was not charged, the scandal broke in 2008 and led to his resignation. Another well-documented case is that of French politician Dominique Strauss-Kahn, who in 2011 was head of the International Monetary Fund and was the favored candidate for the socialist party for the French presidency in 2012. For many years, it

had been rumored that he had sex parties with prostitutes (paying for sex is legal in France, but going to brothels is not, and neither is using sex workers if they have been hired by an intermediary such as an escort service). After his alleged assault of a hotel maid in New York City, he resigned, and subsequent investigations showed that the rumors of sex parties in multiple countries were factual.

High-class escorts may pay up to 50% of their fee to the agency that hires them. They may also work solo, which is more common in countries where such solo sex work is legal, which includes France, parts of Australia, and England. Perhaps the most famous solo call girl is Belle de Jour, who maintained a popular blog in the 2000s and wrote two best-selling memoirs of her experiences as a call girl, leading to a popular TV series in the United Kingdom, *Secret Diary of a Call Girl* (remade in the United States). Although people speculated that she was making it up, in 2009 her identity was revealed as Brooke Magnanti, a research scientist who had a master's degree in genetic epidemiology and a PhD in forensic science, who essentially had been telling the truth and did indeed put herself through graduate school by working part-time as an escort, earning approximately \$600 per hour (converting and adjusting for inflation). Although she only spent 14 months as a prostitute, she has no regrets about it, saying that she found it preferable to a part-time job she had as a computer programmer (Gallagher, 2009). <sup>[10]</sup>

## Brothels and Midprice Sex Work

Figure 4.4 "Brothels from Antiquity, to Montana, to Germany" shows evidence of brothels from a variety of historical eras, from the ancient Roman era in Pompeii to late 1800s Montana and to modern-day Berlin. In some eras, brothels have been legal and taxed, in others they have been illegal but tolerated, and in others they have been strictly prohibited. The same is true today. Germany and parts of the Netherlands are examples of countries with legal and regulated brothels. Workers are taxed, and inspections, including health inspections, are performed at regular intervals. Amsterdam's "red-light" district is perhaps the most famous in the world: a few blocks from the main train station in a now-expensive pedestrian area, there is a long row of townhouses where the fronts are large glass windows with red lights inside showing primarily women available for hire. When a customer enters, the curtains are closed while sex takes place. In the day, the area is popular with families, who can be seen with young children, but at night, it can get very crowded with young intoxicated tourists from other countries. The Dutch are famous for having a policy of tolerance but from time to time debate shutting down the red-light district to reduce the influence of organized crime and the rowdiness from intoxicated tourists.

Figure 4.4 Brothels from Antiquity, to Montana, to Germany <sup>[1]</sup>





*On the left is a fresco retrieved from a brothel in the ruins of Pompeii during the time of the Roman Empire. In the center is a brothel in Montana from the late 1800s. On the right is “Pascha,” a 12-story-high brothel in the German city of Köln (Cologne), which made headlines in 2007 when it offered an early-bird special for senior citizens—half price between noon and 5:00 pm.*

In the United States, brothels are legal only in certain counties of Nevada, including those outside (but not within the city limits) of Las Vegas. This is a marked contrast from the 1800s, when brothels were common throughout the Midwest as well as in East Coast cities. In New York City in the late 1870s, there were so many brothels that a regular guide was printed, called *The Gentleman’s Directory*, running 55 pages and containing reviews of 150 brothels (Cowan, 2011). <sup>[12]</sup> Today, websites exist in many countries that provide customer reviews of individual prostitutes as well as escort services and agencies. In the 1800s in Europe and the United States, brothels were tolerated, although not encouraged. At the time, virtuous women suitable for marriage were believed to have no interest in sex, and if a woman was interested in sex, she was thought to be impure, immoral, or insane. So it was expected that married men would seek sexual relations outside of their marriage with prostitutes. The era of widely tolerated urban brothels in many cities in the United States and Europe came to an end in the early 1900s, when rates of syphilis and gonorrhea reached record highs and the connection between sex and these diseases had been medically established but effective treatments did not exist.

In countries where brothels are illegal, they may nevertheless exist informally. In the United States, for example, some massage parlors are genuinely health spas or massage parlors, and some are fronts for a sexual massage with a “release” or “happy ending” that typically involves the sex worker masturbating the client but may also involve other services. Likewise, strip clubs may offer lap dances, in which there is no contact or contact occurs through clothing and is legal, but these clubs may also have private rooms where clients can pay for other sexual acts for an additional fee (such as oral sex or manual stimulation, even though this may be illegal in the jurisdiction). As with other activities that are illegal or marginalized but highly profitable, organized crime is often involved—in both illegal and legal aspects of the commercial sex industry (Jeffreys, 2009). <sup>[13]</sup> While prostitutes in brothels tend to make wages in the middle portion of the spectrum, some who work in brothels may also be trafficked and be in a type of sexual slavery, making no income whatsoever. We discuss this in [Chapter 4, Section 3.8 “Research on Human Trafficking, Sexual Slavery, and Exploitation”](#) in the context of human trafficking.

## Streetwalkers and Hustlers

In many parts of the world, the most dangerous and also the lowest-paid type of sex work involves streetwalkers or hustlers. These people may work for a pimp who takes some of their earnings, or they may freelance.

Venkatesh (2011) <sup>[14]</sup> reported that in New York, streetwalkers typically earn \$75 for a transaction, are beaten 4 times a year, are arrested twice a year, and have drug habits. By comparison, a high-class escort is unlikely to be addicted to drugs, can earn more than \$100,000 a year, is rarely subject to any violence, and almost never has contact with the police (police tend to arrest streetwalkers far more than they prosecute escorts).

Streetwalkers generally perform their services in a client's vehicle. In many jurisdictions, this violates laws against both prostitution and sex in a public place. For example, in 1995 film star Hugh Grant was arrested for having a Los Angeles streetwalker perform oral sex on him in his BMW while parked in an alley. At the time, he was 35 years old, a recent Oscar winner, and considered one of the most attractive film stars. In Germany, streetwalking is legal, with some towns providing meters, similar to parking meters, which the prostitutes must purchase, giving them the right to sell sex on the street for a period of time that day. In response to complaints from nearby residents seeing streetwalkers perform sex in clients' cars, some German cities have erected drive-in "sex boxes"—parking spaces with tall fences around them specifically so that streetwalkers can have sex with clients without disturbing neighborhood residents (Mail Foreign Service, 2010). <sup>[15]</sup> Fenced privacy areas for sex with streetwalkers are also common in some parts of the Netherlands (Bernstein, 2007). <sup>[16]</sup>

## Ethics, Morality, and Laws Regarding Prostitution

From a contemporary Abrahamic religious perspective, where sexual relations should occur in the context of marriage, prostitution is inherently immoral. However, in medieval Christian Europe, with the occasional exception such as an ordinance of Saint Louis in 1254, prostitution was viewed as being necessary and as leading to lower levels of sexual passions than if it were outlawed (Otis, 1985). <sup>[17]</sup> Today, in some branches of Islam where multiple marriages are allowed, a temporary marriage—referred to as a *Nikah al-Mut'ah*—is granted for the duration of a sexual liaison. Although practiced in the Prophet Muhammad's time, most branches of Islam no longer recognize this.

From a secular perspective, opinions about prostitution have also varied, as there are secular arguments both in favor of and against it. Those in favor of legalizing and regulating prostitution suggest that, in terms of personal autonomy, if a person has other career choices and prefers to do sex work, this should be permitted. There are many occupations that involve touching other people's bodies in a nonsexual manner (e.g., physicians,



masseurs) or that involve some aspect of sexual stimulation (e.g., television and film stars performing simulated sex), and actual sex is seen as no different from these. Zelizer (2005)<sup>[18]</sup> suggested that money and economic ties are a part of many intimate relationships. She noted that this has been true historically and that it is also true in modern times where partners both have careers. She suggested that marital love, although usually seen as being different from prostitution, actually involves transactions and economic activity, as do many relationships. Libertarians and advocates of a free market feel that choices between adults should not be constrained. Another perspective, advocated by sex workers and some feminists, is that some people enjoy sex work and that this should be the choice a person—male or female—makes about his or her body.

Secular arguments against prostitution, particularly common among feminists, are that the clients of prostitutes are by and large men and that prostitutes are mostly women, and there is an inherent inequality and sexism involved in prostitution because of this gender imbalance, which reflects inequalities that exist against women. Further, they argue that very few people enter prostitution completely by choice and that, generally speaking at every level, those who do prostitution choose it in part because they can make more money that way than in other jobs—so there is an element of economic exploitation.

In the United States, ballot measures to legalize prostitution have generally failed, including a 2008 measure in San Francisco. In Canada in 2012, the Court of Appeal for Ontario ruled in favor of a group who claimed that the laws banning brothels violated individual freedom. The case may go to the Supreme Court of Canada if the Canadian federal government appeals; otherwise brothels will become legal in Canada (prostitution is not criminalized in Canada). Advocates for sex worker safety have also sought to change prosecution standards, such as lobbying for legislation preventing prosecutors from introducing into evidence the number of unused condoms sex workers have at the time of being arrested. Such prosecutorial use of condoms as evidence occurs in multiple countries, including the United States, and has been associated with sex workers no longer carrying or using condoms, thus increasing the risk of HIV and other infections (McLemore, 2012).<sup>[19]</sup>

In some countries, such as Germany (depending on the city), sex work of any type is legal, including brothels, escort agencies, solo prostitutes, and streetwalkers. In others there is a decriminalization, such as in England, where some types of prostitution are legal (escorts) and others (brothels and streetwalkers) are not. In general, in countries where certain types of prostitution are illegal, both the client and the prostitute may be charged criminally, but typically only the prostitutes are charged. Even in these countries where sex work is legal, popular opinion generally stigmatizes sex workers as well as those who pay for sex, although majorities in

several European countries support legalization, which is in contrast to the United States, where majorities oppose it (Weitzer, 2011). <sup>[20]</sup> The trend in many European countries has been toward increasing liberalization with regard to all types of sex work.

A notable exception in Northern Europe is Sweden. A sexually liberal country, Sweden was in the 1960s one of the earliest countries in Europe to fully legalize prostitution. Sweden is also committed to equality between the sexes, and in the 1990s Swedish feminists argued that prostitution inherently involves gender inequality and is a type of violence against women. Sweden's response was to pass new laws in 1999 that again criminalized prostitution but not prostitutes; new punishments were put into place for those who purchase sexual services (clients) as well as those who coordinate such purchases (pimps and brothel owners), and all brothels were outlawed. Other Nordic countries, such as Norway, also committed to gender equality, are considering the Swedish model. The Swedish model is popular in Sweden and appears to have substantially reduced the number of women working as prostitutes, particularly in contrast to neighboring Denmark where prostitution remains legal (Bernstein, 2007). <sup>[21]</sup> Bernstein noted that, while the Swedish policy officially originated for reasons of gender equality, in part the move came at a time in the 1990s when there were concerns in Sweden about an influx of migrant sex workers from Eastern European countries as the European Union expanded and when brothels had become so prevalent that real estate values were depressed in many cities where there were many brothels.

Bernstein (2007) <sup>[22]</sup> noted that similar ambivalence exists in the Netherlands, where sex workers used to be primarily Dutch; many are now from other poorer countries, and concerns about immigration led to reforms in 2000. Unlike in Sweden, brothels and sex clubs in the Netherlands were liberalized, making it easier to operate them, but with jail sentences of up to 6 years for people who employ sex workers who are not legal immigrants. This is estimated to have resulted in a 50% reduction in the actual number of sex workers in the Netherlands, as more than half were illegal immigrants, and the shuttering of up to a quarter of brothels in Amsterdam. In countries with some form of legalization, some sex workers operate "outside" of the rules. This is more likely in those countries where the rules are particularly burdensome. For example, in the U.S. state of Nevada, many more prostitutes work illegally within the city limits of Las Vegas than the number of sex workers who are registered in legal brothels in remote, rural counties far from the population centers. While many groups advocate both strongly for and against prostitution, the most neutral scholarship suggests that legalization is associated with lower rates of violence against sex workers and lower rates of sexually transmitted infections

(STIs; Weitzer, 2011).<sup>[23]</sup> In contrast, antiprostitution enforcement is associated with the marginalization and exploitation of sex workers. Problems of exploitation and trafficking remain, however—even when sex work is legalized.

## **Sexual Tourism and Gigolos**

Cities that attract travelers and tourists have developed reputations as having multiple brothels to cater to the demands of travelers—from the paving stones in the streets of Pompeii in ancient Italy, which used carvings of an erect penis to point to the way to the brothel district, to the literal red lights that illuminate modern-day brothels in Amsterdam. Sexual tourism refers to *travel that is specifically for seeking sexual services*. This can include people traveling to similarly developed economies, such as Swedish men traveling to nearby Denmark, where prostitution remains legal. The term *sexual tourism*, however, generally refers to people traveling from more affluent countries to developing economies for seeking sexual services at reduced prices, where lower wages tend to make prostitution more affordable. Some cities in developing countries have developed reputations for catering to large numbers of sex tourists. For example, Bangkok, the capital of Thailand, has long been a center in Southeast Asia for male-to-female (MTF) gender reassignment surgery. For people who cannot afford the expense of this, sex work is sometimes sought out for MTF transgender individuals who have had hormones and have developed breasts but cannot afford genital sexual reassignment surgery (SRS), also known as surgery to align physical appearance with experienced gender. Bangkok has a particular concentration of such individuals who seek employment as sex workers and, for the predominantly heterosexually identified males who seek them, serves as a center for sex tourism. This has persisted despite efforts by the Thai government to curtail sex tourism.

In the colonial era, the city of Marrakech in Morocco had a reputation for catering to gay male sex tourists from Europe, widely described in mid-20th-century literature. After Morocco gained independence, this was outlawed and is now uncommon. The majority of sex workers in developing economies, however, are female, catering to males. Most authors view this as a particularly harsh form of economic and gender inequality and as a driving force behind coercion and trafficking of sex workers, which we consider in [Chapter 4, Section 3.8 "Research on Human Trafficking, Sexual Slavery, and Exploitation"](#). However, Rivers-Moore (2010)<sup>[24]</sup> argued that in developing economies sex work provides women opportunities for wages far higher than they could otherwise earn and that many enter sex work knowingly.

As already noted, discussions of prostitution generally involve gender inequality, as most clients are males and most sex workers are females. Of course, there are male sex workers, but they also typically work with male clients. Some male sex workers identify as heterosexual and use the term *gay for pay* to differentiate their sexual orientation from male sex workers who are bisexual or gay. Although the terminology has changed, once being called *trade*, this differentiation of a subset of heterosexual male sex workers from gay or bisexual male sex workers has existed for many decades (Reay, 2010).<sup>[25]</sup> However, not all clients of sex workers are male. The term *gigolo* refers to a male who receives money for providing sexual services for a female. Little scholarship exists on gigolos or their prevalence, but abundant anecdotal evidence suggests that it is a very small market, as there are only a handful of websites that cater to female clients. However, there are some qualitative research studies that show that older females from high-income countries on vacation at times seek out “beach boys”—attractive, young adult males from low-income countries who provide companionship and a brief sexual relationship during the vacation in exchange for some financial support. While the beach boys view it as a sexual transaction, the women involved often reported that they saw it as more of a brief romance, although the researchers posited that the two points are ends on one continuum rather than discrete entities (Herold, Garcia, & DeMoya, 2001).<sup>[26]</sup> Sexual tourism by women seeking men has been documented in multiple regions, primarily by affluent Western women traveling to regions with developing economies, including Egypt (Jacobs, 2009),<sup>[27]</sup> Jamaica, and the Dominican Republic (Taylor, 2006).<sup>[28]</sup>

## **Research on Human Trafficking, Sexual Slavery, and Exploitation**

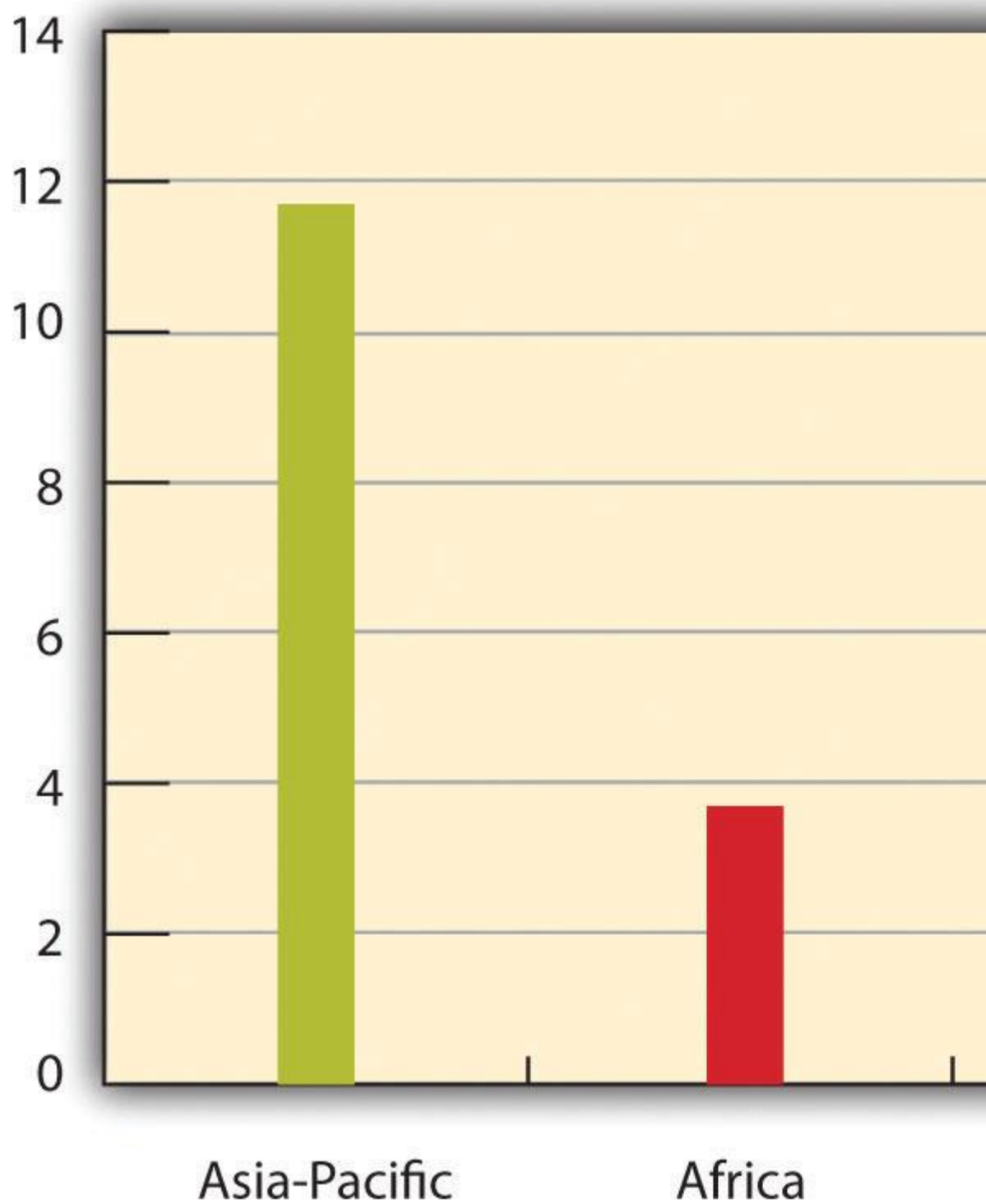
The largest proportion of sexual slavery exists within and between developing economies. Children of both sexes, but particularly girls, are trafficked from rural areas to urban areas. Parents may be falsely assured that a job awaits their children—perhaps as some type of domestic servant—or they may be sold with the consent of parents who have no means of supporting or feeding their children and who do not realize that their children will become prostitutes. Virgins carry a premium, and thereafter they are forced into sexual slavery, sometimes being physically locked up and drugged and forced to have sex with multiple men each day. Rates of HIV infection, other STIs, and death are high (Kristof & WuDunn, 2010; Parrot & Cummings, 2006; Parrot & Cummings, 2008).<sup>[29]</sup><sup>[30]</sup><sup>[31]</sup> At other times, force is not needed; shame alone is sufficient, as the girls and women would face rejection from their families of origin if they were to return home and the truth about their having been forced into sex work were revealed. Numerous case studies exist of such forced child prostitution, particularly in Africa and in poorer regions of South and Southeast Asia, including India, Laos, and Cambodia.

While child prostitution is illegal in all these countries, corruption exists, and clear data are difficult to obtain from local governments.

In terms of developed economies, documented cases of sex workers forced into prostitution exist but are believed to represent a small percentage of sex workers. In 2011, many U.S. media outlets reported that between 100,000 and 300,000 children per year were victims of sex trafficking in the United States. In the United States, however, there was actually an average of only 827 arrests made in child prostitution cases on average each year over a 10-year period in the United States (Cizmar, Conklin, & Hinman, 2011).<sup>[32]</sup> The high numbers widely reported in the media in the 2010s originate with the U.S. Department of Justice (Williams & Frederick, 2009).<sup>[33]</sup> They relate to a 2001 study on the number of at-risk children (250,000) and are interpolated from an estimate of the number of runaway children (450,000 per year) and the “extrapolation” that up to one-third of runaways support themselves through prostitution (ECPAT-USA, 2005, p. 3).<sup>[34]</sup>

*Figure 4.5 Forced Labor and Human Trafficking*<sup>[35]</sup>

Number of Forced Laborers by Region  
(in millions)





*This map shows the combined total of people in forced labor worldwide, including for sexual exploitation, estimated by the United Nations to be almost 21 million people. The UN estimates that one-fourth of this total are children, and one-fourth of the total are in sexual exploitation (primarily in developing economies). Human trafficking and labor exploitation includes people who have been coerced, as well as those who have knowingly violated laws seeking work in other countries (illegal immigrants). Both groups are often exploited in destination countries. Most forced labor and sexual exploitation is between developing economies, although some also occurs from developing economies to developed economies. The UN estimates that an additional 2.5 million people are newly trafficked or smuggled each year.*

For example, in 2010 in England, the minister in charge of the Olympics at the time expressed concern about major sporting events being a “magnet for the global sex and trafficking industry” (Cacciottolo, 2012), <sup>[36]</sup> even though in the 2004 Olympics in Athens the total increase in arrests for all of 2004 only doubled the previous year—to 181 cases, rather than to the thousands that were reported—and precisely 0 of the 181 cases were linked to the Olympic games (Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women, 2011). <sup>[37]</sup> Nevertheless, human trafficking and sexual enslavement do occur in the United States and other industrialized economies, often involving the false promise of a good job to an older adolescent or young adult female (Parrot & Cummings, 2008). <sup>[38]</sup>

Although most sex workers in developed economies are not in sexual slavery nor were trafficked, this does not mean that their becoming prostitutes was entirely a free choice made in adulthood. Quite to the contrary, Farley et al. (2004) <sup>[39]</sup> found that in 9 countries, both developed and developing economies, 47% of sex workers were younger than 18 years old when beginning sex work. Most did not use drugs prior to beginning sex work, but many developed a drug habit after, often doing so to cope with negative feelings that develop from sex work. The most common reason for beginning sex work was the need to earn money. For people who began sex work prior to the age of 18, a history of childhood abuse (physical or sexual) was quite common: 59% had been beaten to the point of physical injury, and more than half had experienced multiple adults perpetrating some type of abuse against them. Many prostitutes develop posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after becoming prostitutes (Farley et al., 2004). <sup>[40]</sup> Homelessness is a particularly common cause of prostitution among adolescents in developed economies, some of whom have run away from abusive homes and others of whom have been thrown out by nonaccepting families. A subset of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) adolescents fall into the latter category.

Not all sexually exploited youth are forced into selling sex. In an extensive study of commercially sexually exploited children in New York City, Curtis, Terry, Dank, Dombrowski, and Khan (2008) <sup>[41]</sup> found that most youth boasted about the amount of money they made and did not describe their sex work in a manner that suggested they self-labeled themselves as being exploited. More than 90% were born in the United States (56% born in New York City), the average age they started selling sex was 15 years old, and only 10% were involved with a “market facilitator” (a pimp—45% were males) while the rest were freelance. While most did not live with parents, only a minority lived in the streets, the rest living with friends, in another home. Similar patterns of adolescents entering into prostitution while living at home in order to earn more money than they could earn through other types of work have been observed anecdotally in Poland (Bilefsky, 2010) <sup>[42]</sup> and likely exist in many industrialized countries.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Prostitution has been documented in many historical eras and cultures. There are many types of in-person selling of sexual activity in the modern world, from noncontact activities such as going to strip clubs to engaging in sexual relations.
- The legal status of sex work is highly variable in different countries and, for some countries, within the country. Many models exist for both criminalization and legalization. Models for criminalization include prosecuting prostitutes, customers, or both. Models for legalization include permitting solo prostitution, brothels, or both.
- Prostitution is heavily gender biased, with most but not all sex workers catering to male clients (both male and female sex workers). Historically some female sex workers had relatively high status as courtesans. Today prostitution has relatively low status, although many gradations exist within sex work, and some sex workers may make incomes well above national averages.
- There are secular arguments in favor of and against prostitution. In history, religious arguments have also been made both in favor of and against prostitution.
- Human trafficking and forced labor are substantial problems worldwide, affecting tens of millions of people with millions of newly trafficked people every year, one-fourth of whom are estimated to be children. Perhaps one-fourth of all trafficked individuals are trafficked for sexual exploitation, primarily in and between countries with developing economies, with forced child and adolescent prostitution being concentrated in parts of Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. Traffickers often take advantage of the desire for voluntary migration due to economic necessity.
- In developed economies, most prostitution is voluntary rather than due to trafficking, and adolescents represent a minority of sex workers. Economic reasons are behind most voluntary prostitution.