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Updated, with More Countries

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Contents

HOW TO USE THIS ENCYCLOPEDIA	viii
FOREWORD	ix
<i>Robert T. Francoeur, Ph.D., A.C.S.</i>	
PREFACE	xi
<i>Timothy Perper, Ph.D.</i>	
AN INTRODUCTION TO THE MANY MEANINGS OF SEXOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE	xiii
<i>Ira L. Reiss, Ph.D.</i>	
ARGENTINA	1
<i>Sophia Kamenetzky, M.D.; Updates by S. Kamenetzky</i>	
AUSTRALIA	27
<i>Rosemary Coates, Ph.D.; Updates by R. Coates and Anthony Willmet, Ph.D.</i>	
AUSTRIA	42
<i>Dr. Rotraud A. Perner, L.L.D.; Translated and Redacted by Linda Kneucker; Updates by Linda Kneucker, Raoul Kneucker, and Martin Voracek, Ph.D., M.Sc.</i>	
BAHRAIN	59
<i>Julanne McCarthy, M.A., M.S.N.; Updates by the Editors</i>	
BOTSWANA	89
<i>Godisang Mookodi, Oleosi Ntshibe, and Ian Taylor, Ph.D.</i>	
BRAZIL	98
<i>Sérgio Luiz Gonçalves de Freitas, M.D., with Eli Fernandes de Oliveira and Lourenço Stélio Rega, M.Th.; Updates and comments by Raymond J. Noonan, Ph.D., and Dra. Sandra Almeida, and Luciane Raibin, M.S.</i>	
BULGARIA	114
<i>Michail Alexandrov Okoliyski, Ph.D., and Petko Velichkov, M.D.</i>	
CANADA	126
<i>Michael Barrett, Ph.D., Alan King, Ed.D., Joseph Lévy, Ph.D., Eleanor Maticka-Tyndale, Ph.D., Alexander McKay, Ph.D., and Julie Fraser, Ph.D.; Rewritten and updated by the Authors</i>	
CHINA	182
<i>Fang-fu Ruan, M.D., Ph.D., and M. P. Lau, M.D.; Updates by F. Ruan and Robert T. Francoeur, Ph.D.; Comments by M. P. Lau</i>	
COLOMBIA	210
<i>José Manuel Gonzáles, M.A., Rubén Ardila, Ph.D., Pedro Guerrero, M.D., Gloria Penagos, M.D., and Bernardo Useche, Ph.D.; Translated by Claudia Rockmaker, M.S.W., and Luciane Raibin, M.S.; Updates by the Editors; Comment by Luciane Raibin, M.S.</i>	
COSTA RICA	227
<i>Anna Arroba, M.A.</i>	
CROATIA	241
<i>Aleksandar Štulhofer, Ph.D., Vlasta Hiršl-Hečej, M.D., M.A., Željko Mrkšić, Aleksandra Korać, Ph.D., Petra Hobljaj, Ivanka Ivkanec, Maja Mamula, M.A., Hrvoje Tiljak, M.D., Ph.D., Gordana Buljan-Flander, Ph.D., Sanja Sagasta, Gordana Bosanac, Ana Karlović, and Jadranka Mimica; Updates by the Authors</i>	
CUBA	259
<i>Mariela Castro Espín, B.Ed., M.Sc., and María Dolores Córdova Llorca, Ph.D., main authors and coordinators, with Alicia González Hernández, Ph.D., Beatriz Castellanos Simons, Ph.D., Natividad Guerrero Borrego, Ph.D., Gloria Ma. A. Torres Cueto, Ph.D., Eddy Abreu Guerra, Ph.D., Beatriz Torres Rodríguez, Ph.D., Caridad T. García Álvarez, M.Sc., Ada Alfonso Rodríguez, M.D., M.Sc., Maricel Rebolllar Sánchez, M.Sc., Oscar Díaz Noriega, M.D., M.Sc., Jorge Renato Ibarra Guitart, Ph.D., Sonia Jiménez Berríos, Daimelis Monzón Wat, Jorge Peláez Mendoza, M.D., Mayra Rodríguez Lauzerique, M.Sc., Ofelia Bravo Fernández, M.Sc., Lauren Bardisa Escurra, M.D., Miguel Sosa Marín, M.D., Rosaida Ochoa Soto, M.D., and Leonardo Chacón Asusta</i>	
CYPRUS	279
<i>Part 1: Greek Cyprus: George J. Georgiou, Ph.D., with Alecos Modinos, B.Arch., A.R.I.B.A., Nathaniel Papageorgiou, Laura Papantoniou, M.Sc., M.D., and Nicos Peristianis, Ph.D. (Hons.); Updates by G. J. Georgiou and L. Papantoniou; Part 2: Turkish Cyprus: Kemal Bolayır, M.D., and Serin Kelâmi, B.Sc. (Hons.)</i>	
CZECH REPUBLIC	320
<i>Jaroslav Zvěřina, M.D.; Rewritten and updated by the Author</i>	
DENMARK	329
<i>Christian Graugaard, M.D., Ph.D., with Lene Falgaard Epløv, M.D., Ph.D., Annamaria Giraldi, M.D., Ph.D., Ellids Kristensen, M.D., Else Munck, M.D., Bo Møhl, clinical psychologist, Annette Fuglsang Owens, M.D., Ph.D., Hanne Risør, M.D., and Gerd Winther, clinical sexologist</i>	
EGYPT	345
<i>Bahira Sherif, Ph.D.; Updates by B. Sherif and Hussein Ghanem, M.D.</i>	
ESTONIA	359
<i>Elina Haavio-Mannila, Ph.D., Kai Haldre, M.D., and Osmo Kontula, Ph.D.</i>	
FINLAND	381
<i>Osmo Kontula, D.Soc.Sci., Ph.D., and Elina Haavio-Mannila, Ph.D.; Updates by O. Kontula and E. Haavio-Mannila</i>	
FRANCE	412
<i>Michel Meignant, Ph.D., chapter coordinator, with Pierre Dalens, M.D., Charles Gellman, M.D., Robert Gellman, M.D., Claire Gellman-Barroux, Ph.D., Serge Ginger, Laurent Malterre, and France Paramelle; Translated by Genevieve Parent, M.A.; Redacted by Robert T. Francoeur, Ph.D.; Comment by Timothy Perper, Ph.D.; Updates by the Editors</i>	
FRENCH POLYNESIA	431
<i>Anne Bolin, Ph.D.; Updates by A. Bolin and the Editors</i>	

GERMANY	450	NEPAL	714
<i>Rudiger Lautmann, Ph.D., and Kurt Starke, Ph.D.;</i> <i>Updates by Jakob Pastoetter, Ph.D., and Hartmut</i> <i>A. G. Bosinski, Dr.med.habil., and the Editor</i>		<i>Elizabeth Schroeder, M.S.W.</i>	
GHANA	467	NETHERLANDS	725
<i>Augustine Ankomah, Ph.D.; Updates by Beldina</i> <i>Opiyo-Omolo, B.Sc.</i>		<i>Jelto J. Drenth, Ph.D., and A. Koos Slob, Ph.D.;</i> <i>Updates by the Editors</i>	
GREECE	479	NIGERIA	752
<i>Dimosthenis Agraftiotis, Ph.D., Elli Ioannidi, Ph.D.,</i> <i>and Panagiota Mandi, M.Sc.; Rewritten and updated</i> <i>in December 2002 by the Authors</i>		<i>Uwem Edimo Esiet, M.B., B.S., M.P.H., M.I.L.D.,</i> <i>chapter coordinator; with Christine Olunfinke Adebajo,</i> <i>Ph.D., R.N., H.D.H.A., Mairo Victoria Bello, Rakiya</i> <i>Booth, M.B.B.S., F.W.A.C.P., Imo I. Esiet, B.Sc, LL.B.,</i> <i>B.L., Nike Esiet, B.Sc., M.P.H. (Harvard), Foyin</i> <i>Oyebola, B.Sc., M.A., and Bilkisu Yusuf, B.Sc., M.A.,</i> <i>M.N.I.; Updates by Beldina Opiyo-Omolo, B.Sc.</i>	
HONG KONG	489	NORWAY	781
<i>Emil Man-lun Ng, M.D., and Joyce L. C. Ma, Ph.D.;</i> <i>Updates by M. P. Lau, M.D., and Robert T.</i> <i>Francoeur, Ph.D.</i>		<i>Elsa Almås, Cand. Psychol., and Esben Esther Pirelli</i> <i>Benestad, M.D.; Updates by E. Almås and E. E.</i> <i>Pirelli Benestad</i>	
ICELAND	503	OUTER SPACE and ANTARCTICA	795
<i>Sóley S. Bender, R.N., B.S.N., M.S., Coordinator, with</i> <i>Sigrún Júlíusdóttir, Ph.D., Thorvaldur Kristinsson,</i> <i>Haraldur Briem, M.D., and Guðrún Jónsdóttir, Ph.D.;</i> <i>Updates by the Editors</i>		<i>Raymond J. Noonan, Ph.D.; Updates and new</i> <i>material by R. J. Noonan</i>	
INDIA	516	PAPUA NEW GUINEA	813
<i>Jayaji Krishna Nath, M.D., and Vishwarath R. Nayar;</i> <i>Updates by Karen Pechilis-Prentiss, Ph.D., Aparna</i> <i>Kadari, B.A., M.B.A., and Robert T. Francoeur, Ph.D.</i>		<i>Shirley Oliver-Miller; Comments by Edgar</i> <i>Gregerson, Ph.D.</i>	
INDONESIA	533	PHILIPPINES	824
<i>Wimpie I. Pangkahila, M.D., Ph.D. (Part 1); Ramsey</i> <i>Elkholy, Ph.D. (cand.) (Part 2); Updates by Robert T.</i> <i>Francoeur, Ph.D.</i>		<i>Jose Florante J. Leyson, M.D.; Updates by</i> <i>J. F. J. Leyson</i>	
IRAN	554	POLAND	846
<i>Paula E. Drew, Ph.D.; Updates and comments by</i> <i>Robert T. Francoeur, Ph.D.; Comments by F. A.</i> <i>Sadeghpour</i>		<i>Anna Sierzpowska-Ketner, M.D., Ph.D.; Updates by</i> <i>the Editors</i>	
IRELAND	569	PORTUGAL	856
<i>Thomas Phelim Kelly, M.B.; Updates by Harry A.</i> <i>Walsh, Ed.D., and the Editors</i>		<i>Nuno Nodin, M.A., with Sara Moreira, and Ana</i> <i>Margarida Ouró, M.A.; Updates by N. Nodin</i>	
ISRAEL	581	PUERTO RICO	877
<i>Ronny A. Shtarkshall, Ph.D., and Minah Zemach,</i> <i>Ph.D.; Updates by R. A. Shtarkshall and M. Zemach</i>		<i>Luis Montesinos, Ph.D., and Juan Preciado, Ph.D.;</i> <i>Redacted and updated by Felix M. Velázquez-Soto, M.A.,</i> <i>and Glorivee Rosario-Pérez, Ph.D., and Carmen Rios</i>	
ITALY	620	RUSSIA	888
<i>Bruno P. F. Wanrooij, Ph.D.; Updates by</i> <i>B. P. F. Wanrooij</i>		<i>Igor S. Kon, Ph.D.; Updates by I. S. Kon</i>	
JAPAN	636	SOUTH AFRICA	909
<i>Yoshiro Hatano, Ph.D., and Tsuguo Shimazaki;</i> <i>Updates and comments by Yoshimi Kaji, M.A.,</i> <i>Timothy Perper, Ph.D., and Martha Cornog, M.S.,</i> <i>M.A., and Robert T. Francoeur, Ph.D.</i>		<i>Lionel John Nicholas, Ph.D., and Priscilla Sandra</i> <i>Daniels, M.S. (Part 1); Mervyn Bernard Hurwitz, M.D.</i> <i>(Part 2); Updates by L. J. Nicholas, Ph.D.</i>	
KENYA	679	SOUTH KOREA	933
<i>Norbert Brockman, Ph.D.; Updates by Paul Mwangi</i> <i>Kariuki and Beldina Opiyo-Omolo, B.Sc.</i>		<i>Hyung-Ki Choi, M.D., Ph.D., and Huso Yi, Ph.D. (cand.),</i> <i>with Ji-Kan Ryu, M.D., Koon Ho Rha, M.D., and Woong</i> <i>Hee Lee, M.D.; Redacted with additional information</i> <i>and updated as of March 2003 by Huso Yi, Ph.D. (cand.),</i> <i>with additional information by Yung-Chung Kim,</i> <i>Ki-Nam Chin, Pilwha Chang, Whasoon Byun, and</i> <i>Jungim Hwang</i>	
MEXICO	692	SPAIN	960
<i>Eusebio Rubio, Ph.D.; Updates by the Editors</i>		<i>Jose Antonio Nieto, Ph.D. (coordinator), with Jose</i> <i>Antonio Carrobes, Ph.D., Manuel Delgado Ruiz, Ph.D.,</i> <i>Felix Lopez Sanchez, Ph.D., Virginia Maquieira D'Angelo,</i> <i>Ph.L.D., Josep-Vicent Marques, Ph.D., Bernardo Moreno</i> <i>Jimenez, Ph.D., Raquel Osborne Verdugo, Ph.D., Carmela</i> <i>Sanz Rueda, Ph.D., and Carmelo Vazquez Valverde, Ph.D.;</i> <i>Translated by Laura Berman, Ph.D., and Jose Nanin,</i>	
MOROCCO	703		
<i>Nadia Kadiri, M.D., and Abderrazak Moussaïd, M.D.,</i> <i>with Abdelkrim Tirraf, M.D., and Abdallah Jadid, M.D.;</i> <i>Translated by Raymond J. Noonan, Ph.D., and Dra.</i> <i>Sandra Almeida; Comments by Elaine Hatfield, Ph.D.,</i> <i>and Richard Rapson, Ph.D.; Updates by the Editors</i>			

M.A.; Updates by Laura Berman, Ph.D., Jose Nanin, M.A., and the Editors

SRI LANKA972
Victor C. de Munck, Ph.D.; Comments by Patricia Weerakoon, Ph.D.

SWEDEN984
Jan E. Trost, Ph.D., with Mai-Briht Bergstrom-Walan, Ph.D.; Updates by the Editors

SWITZERLAND995
Prof. Johannes Bitzer, M.D., Ph.D., Judith Adler, Ph.D., Prof. Dr. Udo Rauschfleisch Ph.D., Sibyl Tschudin, M.D., Elizabeth Zemp, M.D., and Ulrike Kosta

TANZANIA1009
Philip Setel, Eleuther Mwageni, Namsifu Mndeme, and Yusuf Hemed; Additional comments by Beldina Opiyo-Omolo, B.Sc.

THAILAND1021
Kittiwut Jod Taywaditep, Ph.D., Eli Coleman, Ph.D., and Pacharin Dumronggittigule, M.Sc.; Updates by K. J. Taywaditep, Ryan Bishop, Ph.D., and Lillian S. Robinson, Ph.D.

TURKEY1054
Hamdullah Aydın, M.D., and Zeynep Gülçat, Ph.D.; Rewritten and updated in 2003 by H. Aydın and Z. Gülçat

UKRAINE1072
Tamara V. Hovorun, Ph.D., and Borys M. Vornyk, Ph.D. (Medicine); Rewritten and updated in 2003 by T. V. Hovorun and B. M. Vornyk

UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND1093
Kevan R. Wylie, M.B., Ch.B., M.Med.Sc., M.R.C.Psych., D.S.M., chapter coordinator and contributor, with Anthony Bains, B.A., Tina Ball, Ph.D., Patricia Barnes, M.A., CQSW, BASMT (Accred.), Rohan Collier, Ph.D., Jane Craig, M.B., MRCP (UK), Linda Delaney, L.L.B., M.Jur., Julia Field, B.A., Danya Glaser, MBBS, D.Ch., FRCPsych., Peter Greenhouse, M.A., MRCOG, MFFP, Mary Griffin, M.B., M.Sc., MFFP, Margot Huish, B.A., BASMT (Accred.), Anne M. Johnson, M.A., M.Sc., M.D., MRCGP, FFPAM, George Kinghorn, M.D., FRCP, Helen Mott, B.A. (Hons.), Paula Nicolson, Ph.D., Jane Read, B.A. (Hons.), UKCP, Fran Reader, FRCOG, MFFP, BASMT (Accred.), Gwyneth Sampson, DPM, MRCPsych., Peter Selman, DPSA, Ph.D., José von Bühler, R.M.N., Dip.H.S., Jane Wadsworth, B.Sc., M.Sc., Kaye Wellings, M.A., M.Sc., and Stephen Whittle, Ph.D.; Extensive updates and some sections rewritten by the original authors as noted in the text

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA1127
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VIETNAM1337
Jakob Pastoetter, Ph.D.; Updates by J. Pastoetter

LAST-MINUTE DEVELOPMENTS1363
Added by the Editors after the manuscript had been typeset

GLOBAL TRENDS: SOME FINAL IMPRESSIONS1373
Robert T. Francoeur, Ph.D., and Raymond J. Noonan, Ph.D.

CONTRIBUTORS and ACKNOWLEDGMENTS1377

AN INTERNATIONAL DIRECTORY OF SEXOLOGICAL ORGANIZATIONS, ASSOCIATIONS, AND INSTITUTES1394
Compiled by Robert T. Francoeur, Ph.D.

INDEX1405

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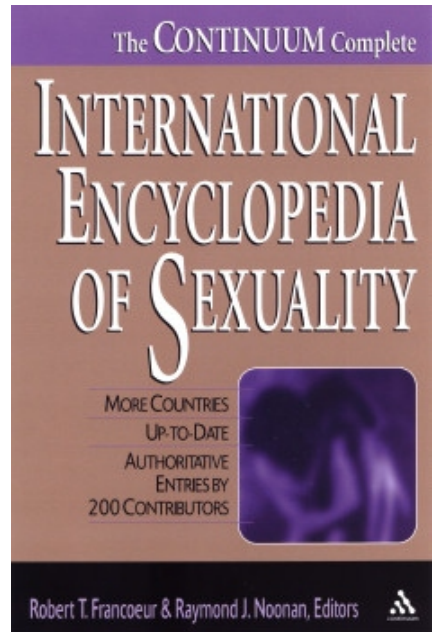
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Contents

- Demographics and a Brief Historical Perspective 1021
1. Basic Sexological Premises 1022
 2. Religious, Ethnic, and Gender Factors Affecting Sexuality 1027
 3. Knowledge and Education about Sexuality 1030
 4. Autoerotic Behaviors and Patterns 1030
 5. Interpersonal Heterosexual Behaviors 1031
 6. Homoerotic, Homosexual, and Bisexual Behaviors 1036
 7. Gender Diversity and Transgender Issues 1039
 8. Significant Unconventional Sexual Behaviors 1041
 9. Contraception, Abortion, and Population Planning 1047
 10. Sexually Transmitted Diseases and HIV/AIDS 1048
 11. Sexual Dysfunctions, Counseling, and Therapies 1049
 12. Sex Research and Advanced Professional Education 1049
- Summary 1050
References and Suggested Readings 1051

Demographics and a Brief Historical Perspective

ROBERT T. FRANCOEUR

A. Demographics

Thailand, formerly known as Siam, is a kingdom located in Southeast Asia. The total area of Thailand is 198,450 square miles (514,000 km²). The capital, Bangkok, situated in the central region, is also the largest city, with a population of 7.8 million. Thailand is bordered on the north and west by Myanmar (formerly Burma), on the north and east across the Mekong River by Laos, on the southeast by Kampuchea (Cambodia), and on the south by Malaysia.

In July 2002, Thailand had an estimated population of 62.3 million. (All data are from *The World Factbook 2002* (CIA 2002) unless otherwise stated.)

Age Distribution and Sex Ratios: 0-14 years: 23.3% with 1.04 male(s) per female (sex ratio); 15-64 years: 69.9% with 0.97 male(s) per female; 65 years and over: 6.8% with 0.78 male(s) per female; *Total population sex ratio:* 0.97 male(s) to 1 female

Life Expectancy at Birth: *Total Population:* 69.18 years; *male:* 66 years; *female:* 72.51 years

Urban/Rural Distribution: 20% to 80%

Ethnic Distribution: Thai: 75%; Chinese: 14%; other: 11%

Religious Distribution: Buddhism: 95%; Muslim: 3.8%; Christianity: 0.5%; Hinduism: 0.1%; other: 0.6% (1991 est.)

Birth Rate: 16.39 births per 1,000 population

Death Rate: 7.55 per 1,000 population

Infant Mortality Rate: 29.5 deaths per 1,000 live births

Net Migration Rate: 0 migrant(s) per 1,000 population

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(CIA 2002)

Total Fertility Rate: 1.86 children born per woman

Population Growth Rate: 0.88%

HIV/AIDS (1999 est.): *Adult prevalence:* 2.15%; *Persons living with HIV/AIDS:* 755,000; *Deaths:* 66,000. (For additional details from www.UNAIDS.org, see end of Section 10B.)

Literacy Rate (*defined as those age 15 and over who can read and write*): 93.8% (*male:* 96%, *female:* 91.6%), with 96% attending six years of compulsory education. The chief language of Thailand is Thai, one of the 40 or so languages in the Tai family found in Thailand, Laos, North Vietnam, and parts of China (Crystal 1987). Among a number of languages previously spoken in this region, the Thai language or Siamese Tai became the language of administration and prestige in the late 12th century, with its script invented in 1283 (Wyatt 1984). Today, the regional dialects are also spoken in Thailand, as well as Lao, Chinese, and Malay. English is taught in schools and colleges and is also used in academia, commerce, and government.

Per Capita Gross Domestic Product (*purchasing power parity*): \$6,600 (2001 est.); *Inflation:* 1.6%; *Unem-*

ployment: 3.9%; Living below the poverty line: 12.5% (1998 est.)

B. A Brief Historical Perspective

Historians have hypothesized that Thai (or "Tai") people began migrating from southern China to the central portion of the Indochinese peninsula in the 6th century. Over the centuries, the Thai identity has emerged from the interaction between these Tai people, later immigrants, and the indigenous inhabitants of this region, namely the Mon and Khmer (Wyatt 1984). Following the Burmese destruction of their previous Ayudhya kingdom in 1767, the Thai people rose from the ruins with an astonishing vigor. The kingdom of Siam was reconstituted within a few years by combining other principalities and kingdoms (e.g., Chiangmai and Khorat), thereby expanding its territories to include a number of distinct civilizations and peoples in the Indochinese region. The new capital, Bangkok, was established on the bank of the Chaophraya River in 1782, with walls and buildings built from thousands of boatloads of bricks taken from the ruins of Ayudhya. In the new city of shining monasteries and a new royal palace, with bustling canals crisscrossing the city instead of roads, the intermingling of classes, cultures, and ethnicities in the early Bangkok Empire has been vividly depicted by David Wyatt:

[The] princes and officials constructed homes along the network of canals radiating eastward from the palace and Chinese and Indian merchants built their shops and warehouses along the river to the south. . . . [Outside the main walls of the city,] . . . the Chams attached to the army; there are a group of Malays who manned naval vessels, clustered around an Islamic house of worship; north of the city, [there was] a settlement of Roman Catholics descended from Portuguese and Japanese Christians. (1984, 146)

Thailand has been independent during most of its history, except for a few relatively brief periods of occupation by Burma or the Japanese military. This long-term independence has allowed for a very distinct blend of cultures to thrive over many centuries. Thailand is also the only country in Southeast Asia never taken over by a European power, thanks in part to King Chulalongkorn and his son, King Mongkut, who modernized the country and signed trade agreements with both Britain and France in the late 19th century and early 20th century. The kingdom's name was changed from Siam to Thailand in 1939 during a politically tumultuous time. Reflecting the nationalistic attempt to revise the country's ethnic identity, the new name had a linguistic kinship with Thai-speaking peoples in the periphery of the kingdom, therefore downplaying the powers of the central Siamese people and the Chinese, who began to gain economic significance (Wyatt 1984).

The absolute monarchy transferred power to the politicians and the military in a bloodless revolution in 1932, although the monarchy is still held in very high regard in the present Thai society. Thailand considers itself a democratic nation; however, corruption, multiple coups, and the tremendous influence of the military in politics have led journalists to ridicule the nation's democratic system as "half-democracy." After the mid-1992 bloody uprising against the military's longstanding influence in the House of Representatives, the role of the military in politics has been under scrutiny more than ever.

C. Thai Language, Sex Research, and Resources

The Thai Language

In this chapter, romanization of Thai words is adapted from the Thai Royal Academy's system, with the goal of ap-

proximating the original pronunciation (without the intonation) while maintaining the readability of the text for readers unfamiliar with the transliteration system. In general, the spelling of Sanskrit-, Pali-, or English-derived vocabulary prefers the reflection of its Thai pronunciation over the etymological origin. Aspirated consonants *p*, *t*, and *k* are represented by *ph*, *th*, and *kh*. For example, *phii* is pronounced "pee," not "fee," and the *th*, as in *kathoey*, is pronounced as the *t* in the words "to" or "ten," not as the *th* in "than" or "think." Proper nouns are represented in romanization with an initial capital letter. Romanization of personal names follows the individual's preference or the spelling in English-language print, and ranks or degrees are, with few exceptions, omitted. In order to facilitate literature searches on an international level, papers and quotations by Thai authors are referred to by their last names, not first names as is common in Thailand.

Gender/Sexuality Studies

Systematic studies of gender and sexuality in Thailand are relatively new. Mostly spurred by the HIV epidemic, the majority of data on sexual behavior was collected in the early 1990s in response to the public health demands. Although considerable data have been generated, critics have pointed out that synthesis on a conceptual level is still needed. Also missing is the documentation of the ancient sexuality in this region, which would have provided a historiographic insight into the dynamics of the Thai sexuality over time. Exchange of findings and discourse among researchers are also hindered to a certain degree by the less-established avenues for publication and presentation. Many papers appear only in local academic bulletins or conferences, whereas others are published in international journals.

Resources

In writing this chapter, we relied primarily on two sources: the published papers and presentations, which provided most of the reviewed empirical data, and the analysis and interpretation of the cultural phenomena in Thailand. Although our analysis of some Thai social constructions and themes (e.g., gender roles and sexual norms) may not represent a consensus, we nevertheless try to present the converged opinions among researchers and observers whom we have worked with over the years. Finally, it is important to bear in mind that what is known about gender and sexuality in Thailand is changing rapidly, and this review summarizes formal and informal observations in Thai society up until early 1997. [Update 2003: In *Woman, Man, Bangkok: Love, Sex, and Popular Culture in Thailand*, Scot Barmé (2002) has created a vibrant cultural history of early modern Thailand, with focuses on conflicts and controversies, such as the status of women, gender relations, polygamy, class antagonisms, and the emergence of a commercial mass culture. (End of update by R. T. Francoeur)]

1. Basic Sexological Premises

A. The Ideal Gender Images: *Kulasatrii* and *Chaai Chatrii*

The Ideal Thai Woman

There is not much question that Thailand is a male-dominated, patriarchal society, as political and corporate leadership has always been in the hands of men. On the other hand, the power of Thai women, especially in rural societies, lies in their domestic role as the mother-nurturer (see Keyes 1985; and the discussion in Section 2A, Religious and Ethnic Factors Affecting Sexuality, Religious Factors). Women in Thailand look up to the role of motherhood as an ideal. A woman's status changes to adulthood at the point of

her childbirth, after which she is recognized semiformally as *mae* or “mother” (Keyes 1984; Pyne 1994). In fact, the preparation for this “mother” title takes place informally much earlier, as young girls or unmarried women are often titled *mae* with an endearing or humorous tone. Thai men refer to the female gender with a sense of reverence as “the gender of mothers” (*phayt mae*), acknowledging women’s burden in childbearing and parenting responsibilities. The ultimate insult for Thai men is *yet mae*, which literally translates to “motherfucker” in English, indicating the utmost respect that mothers have in Thai culture.

Regarding the nurturer role, women’s specialization in economic-type occupations illustrates their powerful role in providing for the well-being of their families. Women’s dedication to nurturance is evident in the expression that a good woman “wakes up earlier and goes to sleep later than her husband.” The variety and extent of women’s nurturing responsibilities are superbly illustrated in two studies in two vastly different contexts: Penny Van Esterik (1982) depicts the household and religious responsibilities of well-to-do women in western central Thailand; Susanne Thorbek (1988) details the endless household duties of the slum-dwelling women in Khlong Toey, Bangkok. Since the economic climate changed in the 1960s and 1970s, women have accounted for almost half, and sometimes more than half, of the large number of rural Thais who migrate to the cities in order to augment the family income (Keyes 1984). Today, women account for 80% of the total employment in the ten largest export industries and 45% of the manufacturing workforce (data cited in Pyne 1994). Over the years, Thai women have made significant contributions in the arts, education, and commerce. With higher education, women have also risen to leadership positions in the middle class. The “glass ceiling” exists for women in the academic and corporate settings, as evident in the fact that, although there are many women in high positions, the topmost position of an organization still belongs to a man. Nevertheless, aside from the obvious underrepresentation in areas such as the military, law enforcement, and religion, the status of women in Thailand is perhaps higher than other countries in Asia with the exception of Singapore. For more-extensive discussions on the gender division of labor, as well as the impact of the rapid socioeconomic changes in recent decades, the reader is referred to the work by Kirsch (1982) and Hnin Hnin Pyne (1994).

The mother-nurturer role is also idealized in the female code of social and sexual conduct. Historically, the Thai tradition has defined a *kulasatrii* (“virtuous woman”) as proficient and sophisticated in household duties; graceful, pleasant, yet unassuming in her appearance and social manners; and conservative in her sexuality. These features bear striking similarities to the traditional “feminine mystique” in other cultures, which has come under the criticism of the Western feminist movement. However, the concept of *kulasatrii* has not been overtly discussed in terms of gender inequality or subordination in Thailand. There has been little dialogue devoted to whether the *kulasatrii* role has been restrictive or unjust to Thai women. On the contrary, most contemporary Thai women wholeheartedly endorse the *kulasatrii* notion without resentment, regarding it as a sign of dignity and honor, a sense of cultural identity in which they can take pride. In school, girls are taught what it means to be a *kulasatrii*, while celebrity figures constantly praise its value in the media. As more and more contemporary women work outside of their homes, the ideal image of a *kulasatrii* remains a goal for which a woman must strive, while simultaneously attempting to fulfill new responsibilities necessitated by the changing society.

The Ideal Thai Man

There are two ideal male images available for Thai men. Corresponding to the Buddha’s biography, Thai men face the recluse/householder or monastic/secular dichotomy (P. Van Esterik 1982). The monastic-recluse image, personified by the Buddha’s life, is the *Sangha*. Through monastic discipline and practice of the *dharma*, monks not only eschew worldly attachments, but also their sexuality and male gender characteristics. On the other hand, the secular male image is represented by the notion of *chaai chaatrii*, which is an embodiment of the typical masculine features also found in other cultures: authority, courage, self-assurance, physical and emotional strengths, and sexual prowess. Various expressions for manhood and manliness reflect an image of a vigorous and muscular warrior: *chaai chaat tha-haan* (referring to the soldier), *chaai ok saam sok* (the muscular chest), *chaai chaat acha-nai* (the stallion’s stamina and perhaps muscularity), and *chaai cha-kan* (strength and vigor). In older men, these youth-typical physical features are de-emphasized as other characteristics become more salient, such as bravery, wisdom, and power (in either political, social, or metaphysical spheres). Nurturance is another ideal dimension in men, as exemplified in the image of a prestigious older man, *pho liang*, who earns respect from his community from his resourcefulness and generous contributions. Traditionally, powerful men and politicians in Thai society have always been expected to exhibit this nurturing trait, perhaps modeled after the paternalism of the Siamese kings since the beginning of the kingdom (Kirsch 1985).

The masculine attributes in the *chaai chaatrii* image have found behavioral expression in the image of a *nug layng*. Translated to a midway between “playboy” and “gangster” in English, the term portrays a powerful man of action who works hard and plays equally hard, is supportive of his friends, fierce to his foes, and also a great womanizer (Thorbek 1988). Although popularized and personified by the Prime Minister, Sarit Thanarat, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the image was hardly a new social construction of the male image. Like Sarit’s political ideology, which “exaggerated traditional values and institutions, buttressing social and political hierarchy at the expense of egalitarianism and even human rights” (Wyatt 1984, 285), his *nug layng* image was simply a paragon of the traditional Thai male role. Sarit excelled in this role in both politics and private life. While known for his emphasis on cleanliness and orderliness and his harsh measures against crimes, Sarit was also notorious for the number of mistresses he kept, which was somewhere between 50 and 200 (Thorbek 1984). Certainly Sarit was not alone in this interpretation of manliness. Over the years, the secular image of Thai men had drifted even further away into the realm of worldly activities and became the antithesis of the *Sangha*. Manliness has become associated with almost every behavior considered by the Thai culture as vices: smoking, drinking, gambling, womanizing, commercial sex, minor wives, public brawls, petty crimes, and corruption, and the list goes on.

Despite such undesirable associations, the code of masculinity has maintained its prestige in Thai society for a long time. Its prestige has only recently been challenged after one of the male vices—commercial sex—was implicated for the spread of HIV. In part, the Theravada view that ordination is always an option for men (see Section 2, Religion and Ethnic Factors Affecting Sexuality, below) could probably account for the longstanding tolerance toward male vices. Further, the ultimate financial control in the households has usually been in the men’s hands, therefore, allowing them to foot the expenses from these vices. Another mechanism also helps prevent any violation of the

male role prescriptions: Secular men who do not participate in these male vices are often labeled by other men with a number of emasculating terms, such as “not a genuine man,” a *kathoe*y (see Section 7, Gender Diversity and Transgender Issues), or *naa tua mia* (“the female face”). The male image’s drift away from the religious ideal is best illustrated in the use of the term *tid*. Abbreviated from the Pali term *pandit* and once granted to a layman who had passed through the monkhood and held knowledge of the Buddhist teachings, *tid* has become a term of derision for “a clumsy [man] who is a tyro in the ways of worldly life” (Sathian Kosed, in Rajadhon 1961, 69).

Despite the rigidity of Thai gender-role manifestations, it is interesting to note that Thai people perceive transience in gender identity. In Buddhist philosophy, the notion of individual “personality” is false, because a being differs upon each incarnation (Kirsch 1982). Gender differs in every life, with social position, fortune or misfortune, mental and physical dispositions, life events, and even the species (human, animal, ghost, or deity) and location of rebirth (strata of heavens or hells), all of which depend on the being’s fund of merit accumulated through committing good deeds in past lives. In the Thai interpretation, women are commonly seen as lower on the hierarchy of merit because they cannot be ordained. Khin Thitsa (1980, cited in Thorbek 1988, 84) observed that according to the Theravada view, “a being is born as a woman because of bad *karma* or lack of sufficient good merit.”

In Susanne Thorbek’s study (1988, 97), a woman illustrates her frustration with being a woman: In a minor domestic crisis, she shouts, “Oh, it’s my evil fate to have been born a woman!” Somewhat more reservedly, a pious young woman in Penny Van Esterik’s study (1982), also admitted her desire to be reborn as a male in order to become a monk. Yet, another more “worldly” woman, seemingly satisfied with her female gender and hoping to be reborn as a deity of the sensuous heavens, argued that those who desired a specific gender upon rebirth would be born of indeterminate sex. Even within a lifespan, men’s transitions between the *Sangha* and the laity demonstrates the transient nature of gender as the two masculine gender roles are abruptly switched. As serious as they are in observing the gender codes, Thai men and women accept gender identities as important yet temporary. Even those in frustration learn to think life will be “better off the next time around,” especially as long as they do not question the inequity of their sometimes arduous, yet transient, states.

[*Comment 2003*: Some observers claim that Thai gender roles are astoundingly malleable and that Thai men and women are able to effortlessly slide up and down the sex/gender continuum (e.g., Morris 1994, 2000). That observation strikes me as false. In my experience, growing to manhood in Thailand and living more recently in Chicago, I would maintain that Thai men and women are no more rigid, nor less rigid, in their gender roles and identities than their Western counterparts. Morris may have misread Thai men’s soft and unassuming social demeanor as feminine, whereas in the Thai gender code, gentleness is not viewed as conflicting with ideal masculinity. Morris may also have observed contemporary Thai women being independent and masculine-appearing, but the same observations can be made by foreigners about American women wearing pants and short hair. Critics have objected to the methodology used to arrive at the conclusion about Thai gender fluidity (such as Morris’ observation), suggesting that the observers relied heavily on anecdotal reports by secondary sources.

[I wonder if the propagation of the idea that Thais’ gender roles are so different and “exotic” might have been

fueled somewhat by the orientalist fantasy. My own observations as a native of Thailand do not concur at all with Morris’ conclusions. I would add, however, that the Thai people’s conceptualization of gender and other attributes of the self are not fixed from one lifetime to another, in accordance with the idea of reincarnation. However, there is little convincing evidence that within one person’s lifetime, Thai people are fluid and malleable in regards to their gender roles (Jackson 1997; Morris 1994, 2000; Nanda 2000). (*End of comment by K. J. Taywaditep*)]

[*Comment 2003*: In the late 19th century, the women of Siam were already challenging the traditional patriarchal value system and setting the stage of today’s seeming sudden revolution in gender roles and attitudes. *Narirom*, a fortnightly magazine, first appeared in 1888, while *Maekasin Watthana*, produced by the Watthana School for Girls, appeared in 1892. The following quote from an October 14, 1914, article in *Satri Niphon* [*Women’s Writing*], one of Siam’s earliest women’s magazines, is indicative of the rich history of feminist and gender debates at the roots of contemporary Thai cultural history:

[In] the past, Siamese women were like dolls kept in a cupboard . . . cut off from the outside world. They were strictly controlled and not allowed to go anywhere. . . . Nowadays the position of women is greatly improved however, they are coping out of the dark (Quoted by Barmé 2002, 17).

(For details on protofeminist discourses in early-20th-century Siam, see: Barmé 2002, 17-42). (*End of comment by R. T. Francoeur*)]

B. Romance, Love, and Marriage

Most cultures glorify and idolize romance between men and women, and Thai people are no exception. Themes of quests for eternal love and the consequences of passion—ecstasy, aspirations, heartbreaks, jealousy, elopements, and deaths—abound in the Thai folklore, literature, and music. Borrowed from the *karma* concept, people explain an unexpected, overwhelming infatuation in metaphysical terms: They were meant for each other because of destiny (*bu-phay vassana*) or they had made merit together in previous lives.

In the Thai vocabulary, there are specific words for “love,” “lust,” “infatuation,” “love at first sight,” “sexual desire,” and so on. In particular, the words *khuam ruk* (love) and *khuam khrai* (lust) are distinct, although they are sometimes used together as *ruk-khrai* to connote affectionate relationships. As will be evident later in the chapter, premarital sex outside the commercial-sex context is forbidden, and the distinction between love and lust are inculcated in young people to deter them from premarital sex within a romantic relationship. In such warnings, love is usually idealized as pure, noble, and epitomized by patience, responsibility, and maturity, whereas lust embodies the qualities opposite to these virtues. The Third Buddhist Precept—to refrain from sexual misconduct, mostly understood to refer to adultery, rape, sexual abuse of children, and careless sexual activities that result in the sorrow of others—is often used as a reference for the danger and demerit of lust. It is noteworthy that in the Buddhist philosophy, both love and lust are worldly attachments, leading to suffering. Lust, however, is deemed more harmful because it violates the Third Precept. In the Thai society, where people make distinctions between “ideal Buddhism” (i.e., as in the supreme Buddhist philosophy) and “practical Buddhism” (i.e., for the laity, guided by the Five Precepts), it is easy to see why love is socially accepted and lust is not.

Because of the social acceptance of love, various expressions of romance are found in everyday life and art forms.

The English-derived term “romantic” has been widely used in Thai to connote an intimate and private ambience for a couple, often without a sexual undertone, such as “romantic” restaurant, music, or sentiment. Women, prohibited from sexual expression unless married (see below), account for a majority of the consumers of popular literature and television drama in which young women’s love lives are portrayed. These contemporary romantic tales are enormously popular, as is evident in their multiple republications and repeated television and film adaptations. Embedded in these love tales are the cultural scripts on love, romance, and marriage; these scripts reflect the corresponding constructions in the Thai culture at large, as well as provide models for the newer generations of audiences. A certain Western ethos is abundant in these novels, many of which are adaptations from the classics by Jane Austen, and Charlotte and Emily Bronte, for example. However, the ethos, particularly the Victorian values for women and the chivalrous demeanor for men, seems congruent with the Thai conceptualizations of gender and heterosexual relationships, and therefore is not seen by contemporary Thais as foreign. Emphasis on women’s virtues, such as the *kulasatrii* code, chastity, patience, and honesty, can be found across a variety of backgrounds and scenarios. The barriers the heroines face symbolize the obstructions Thai women encounter in fulfilling their love, for example, jealous and manipulative women in villain roles (the “bad girl” stereotype, see Section 5A, Interpersonal Heterosexual Behaviors, Adolescent Sexual Behavior), parental objections, and men’s exploitation and sexual discrimination. Cultural and class differences are also significant challenges, ranging from the relationship between a northern woman and a military officer from Bangkok in *Sao Khruea Faa* (which resembles *Madam Butterfly*), to the interracial love between a Thai woman and a Japanese soldier during World War II in *Khuu Kam*, to the intergenerational love between a young woman and a rich and handsome “playboy” many years older in *Salakjit*.

In urban areas, shopping malls, coffee shops, school activities, and, to a lesser extent, nightclubs and discotheques provide places for young people to meet. In rural Thailand, Buddhist temples (*wat*) are instrumental in bringing men and women together during the services, temple fairs, and fundraising ceremonies, where the atmosphere of *samuk* (fun and enjoyment) predominates (Thorbeck 1988). Young women often appear at the *wat* in their best outfits and hairstyles, and the idiomatic expression that a young woman is attractive enough “to go to the *wat*” highlights the social function of temples in rural Thailand (Sathian Kosed, in Rajadhon 1961). Young women also take a keen interest in the young monks who, at the end of the Lenten retreat, will leave the monkhood to become “ripe” laymen, ready for marriage and settling down (P. Van Esterik 1982). Flirtation between men and women is allowed, and although women are somewhat restricted by the *kulasatrii* notion, in numerous age-old courting songs, women are quite bold in making allusions to sex or outright marriage propositions (Keyes 1984). However, women’s candor about romance and sex is still minimal compared to that of men, and it is even more disapproved for middle- and upper-class women. Kirsch (1984) has speculated that young women in the villages may appear to be deeply concerned with love, marriage, and family because they are striving to fulfill the traditional images of women as “mother-nurturer” in rural environments in which alternative options are severely limited.

In contrast with the passionate nature of courting, the ethos of marriage and parenting emphasizes more the practical and grounded values, such as mutual support, trust, and emotional commitment. In the contemporary Thai image of

an ideal marriage, the husband and wife live together in a harmonious, mutually respectful relationship, with the expectation on provision and security weighted towards the man, and the domestic responsibilities towards the woman. A traditional Thai expression compares a married couple to an elephant, with the husband as the two front legs and the wife as the hind ones. In an ideal couple, decision making is the man’s responsibility and the woman’s role is to be supportive and cooperative. A traditional *kulasatrii* shows deference to her husband, as he is the master of the household. In a hierarchical society such as Thailand, where people diligently make obeisance to persons of a higher status, this meant that some women in ancient times showed their husbands an extreme courtesy, which today would be reserved for the elders, teachers, or monks.

In the past few decades, lower- and middle-class women have increasingly worked outside of the homes while continuing to be in charge of the household chores and childcare. Men, however, have not been expected much to adopt the household responsibilities; it is still quite uncommon to expect married men to take on the same extent of responsibilities as their wives in cooking, cleaning, and parenting. In middle-class families, the women’s double responsibility is usually helped by live-in parent(s) or, if they can afford it, maids. In families with lesser means and no live-in parents, the burden on the women can be significant and often becomes a commonly cited cause of sexual disinterest and marital discord (Dumronggittigule, Sombathmai, Taywaditep, & Mandel 1995).

In fact, the divorce rate in Thailand has been growing steadily, paralleling an increase in economic autonomy for women. Divorce and remarriage are not uncommon, although there is a small but palpable degree of stigma, especially among the urban middle-class Thais. We will present further discussions about the tradition of marriage, family settlement, and the dynamics within a married couple in Section 5B, Interpersonal Heterosexual Behaviors, below.

C. A Double Standard for Sexuality and Gender Stereotypes

One of the most consistent findings from sex research in Thailand is that minor wives and commercial sex are common sexual outlets for men of all ages, social standings, and marital statuses. This tolerance of married men’s extramarital sex is merely a part of the larger double standard regarding sexual practices, which mandates different rules for men and for women. As confirmed by studies on childrearing practices, Thai parents train girls more strictly than boys in the behaviors that are part of the gender roles (Archavanitkul & Havanon 1990). Girls are taught that a good woman remains a virgin until marriage and continues to be emotionally and sexually faithful to her husband afterwards. As adolescents, Thai fathers are known for being particularly protective and possessive of their daughters, exercising great control over their friendships with other teenage boys (Thorbeck 1988). For boys, however, sexual abandon is accepted or even encouraged. As Sukanya Hantrakul (1983, quoted in Kaime-Atterhog, Ard-Am, & Sethaput 1994) notes: “Culturally, Thai society flatters men for their promiscuity. . . . Women’s magazines always advise women to tolerate the situation and accommodate themselves to it.”

This double standard in sexual practices may have culminated in an undercurrent of tension between the genders, which, although not readily observable, has been felt and noted by many (e.g., Jackson 1989). Some mistrust and suspicion between the genders can be seen in the negative stereotypes men hold for women, and vice versa. For example, women are stereotyped as emotionally volatile and needy,

and they are often manipulative; a Thai proverb notes that the typical Thai woman, while maintaining the *kulasatrii* appearance, possesses “one hundred wagons full of stratagems.” Conversely, many women believe that men are often unreliable, unable to have an emotional commitment, inefficient in household management and parenting, and constantly driven by their sexual urges. Many women believe that while men get emotional support and recreation from their male peers, relationships with women exist mostly to fulfill the men’s sexual desires, as well as the societal expectations on the men to have a family. However, the men’s sexual desires are often perceived as insatiable, with an immature, uncontrollable character like a child’s craving—yet “naturally” and “instinctually” driven in a way that can hardly be limited to their spouses. As men continue to search for sexual gratification from commercial sex and minor wives, women unwillingly come to terms with the men’s extramarital escapades.

The myth that men’s sexual desires are boundless and immutable is quite pervasive (see more discussion in Section 8A, Significant Unconventional Sexual Behaviors, Coercive Sex). It is common to hear Thai women voice their concern about being raped. When activists demanded that commercial sex be eradicated, respectable men and women have publicly expressed the concern that “good women” would be endangered. Similarly, before HIV became a widespread concern in the Thai society, married women sometimes encouraged their husbands to visit sex workers, in part so they could be relieved of the obligation to serve their husband’s sexual demands, and possibly to prevent the husband’s worse crime of having a stable, emotionally committed relationship with a minor wife. These examples may reflect Thai women’s helplessness regarding the men’s presumably uncontrollable sexual drive, and consequently, their strategies to protect themselves and preserve their marriages. More recent surveys (see Section 5B, Interpersonal Heterosexual Behaviors, Adult Sexual Behavior) have found that married women in the HIV epidemic face an even more difficult dilemma as they realize that they are at risk for HIV infection from their husbands’ use of commercial sex. Encouraging the husband to have a minor wife as an alternative is still a painful decision for a woman to make.

D. Gender in Everyday Life: Social Manners, the Touch Taboo, Female Pollution, and Gender Segregation

In general, Thai people are noted for their tender, friendly, and graceful ways of social and public behavior. Despite the clear masculine code of conduct, Thai men display less of the overt “masculine” behavior than men in many other cultures. Since the 1940s, urban middle- and upper-class men have adopted the Western chivalrous and “gentlemanly” social manners of “honoring” women, such as opening doors for women, and the “ladies first” etiquette. In addition, nurturance, as stated above, is a quality expected in Thai men, even among those in the position of power (see Kirsch 1985). Therefore, Thai men are often known for their polite, sweet, and caring gestures, as well as their respect for others. Women are expected to be all of these and more: the code of *kulasatrii* contains numerous guidance and taboos for the “proper woman.” Thus, the Thai gender-coded rules of conduct seem to place more demands on women than on men, as reflected in an oft-quoted phrase from a poem that “It is hard to be born a woman.” The famous male poet who immortalized this phrase, Soonthon Phuu, in fact wrote “but being a man is actually many times more difficult” as a retort to this phrase, but somehow the complete quote never became as popular.

Although urban Thais have adopted Western clothing styles since the early 1940s, formal social situations, such as the workplace, school, and university, still demand that trousers are strictly for men, and skirts or dresses are for women. Because motorcycles are one of the most popular means of transportation in urban Thailand, women who work in offices and female students struggle every day in their dresses while commuting to and from work. As a passenger, women must sit facing the side of the motorcycle to avoid an unseemly sitting position, compromising their balance and safety in so doing. Perhaps it is small, everyday things like this that best illustrates how the life of a *kulasatrii* is not any easier today than it was in Soonthon Phuu’s time 200 years ago.

In ancient Thailand, acquiring an expertise in certain exclusive areas, such as occultism or martial arts, was seen metaphorically as endowing the apprentice with the mentor spirits, known as *mii khruu* or “under mentorship.” Among the numerous rules of conduct for the learned men, some suggest a belief that men are superior to women, and others indicate some anxiety and animosity surrounding sex and the female anatomy. For example, some learned men must refrain from having sex with a woman. Many men were also prohibited from socializing with women (occasionally including the sister or mother) or their mentor spirits might be weakened by the “weaker sex.” Certain parts of the female body, such as genitalia, buttocks, or menstrual blood, and anything that contacts these body parts, such as sarongs, were considered sacrilegious and harmful to the learned men. Folklore anecdotes portray a vicious sabotage done by a piece of fabric from a woman’s sarong, and a learned man who lost his powers because he had unwittingly walked underneath an elevated house where a woman was physically above him.

Over the years, despite the decline of occultism and superstition, these folk beliefs remain even in those who are not learned men themselves. Tied into the still-popular fatalism (*duang*), many men today believe their destiny can be jeopardized (*choak suay* or “bad luck”) by circumstances such as walking under a row of laundry containing women’s skirts or underwear, or engaging in cunnilingus. Men are also told not to have sex with a menstruating woman or they might become seriously ill (Fuller, Edwards, Sermsri, & Vorakitphokatorn 1993). Even men who are not superstitious keep away from these situations to protect the integrity of their “manhood” or to avoid social disgrace. Even women themselves observe the behavioral restrictions which flow from this idea of symbolic female pollution. A woman who wears a Buddhist amulet is advised to step out of her sarong instead of pulling it over her head, and sarongs are often separated from men’s wear or upper garments in laundry (Manderson 1992).

Examples of gender segregation abound in Thai society. One of the 227 monastic rules of the monks dictates that in addition to being celibate, monks are not to have any physical contact with women. Women, including the monks’ family members, are precluded from certain activities in religious ceremonies to prevent any possibility of ritual purity violation, even accidental contact such as a slight brush of hands. Interestingly, this practice can also be seen in the way modern, urbane gentlemen act toward women: A proper gentleman does not touch a woman in casual circumstances. If he transgresses this social etiquette, an apology is in order. To Thai people, this decorum is impelled by two remarkably different, yet compatible cultural imperatives: firstly, the chivalrous, gentlemanly manners of “honoring” women adopted from the West, and secondly, the animistic belief which prohibits men from touching an unmarried woman to prevent an

offense to her guardian spirits (*phii puu yaa*). However, one can also discern the prevailing myth of men's boundless sexual desires behind this touch taboo. A man's touching of a woman is assumed to have a sexual intention unless otherwise explained. Gender segregation can also be seen on a more formal, institutionalized level. Thai people are socialized to mingle mostly with members of the same gender from a young age. Single-sex schools are very common. In colleges, all dormitories are men- or women-only, with strict rules prohibiting visitations from the other gender, even the students' family members.

Given the foregoing discussion about the touch taboo and gender segregation, it should come as no surprise that open physical expression of affection between men and women is deemed socially inappropriate in the Thai society. Until very recently, a (presumably unmarried) young couple would be frowned upon if they walked hand-in-hand affectionately in public. Conservatives openly condemn the influence of Western culture and the media on younger Thais' public behavior toward the other gender. In contrast, public expressions of affection among members of the same gender are quite common. As pointed out by Jackson (1989), Westerners often misinterpret such displays of same-gender affection as an expression of homoeroticism, or misconstrue it as a lack of homophobia among the Thai people. In fact, this same-gender physical intimacy is not viewed in any sexual way by Thai men or women. It is something similar to the sports camaraderie among Western men or casual affection among Western women, and not associated with either homosexuality or an absence of homophobia. Contrary to the Westerners' misperceptions, anti-homosexual attitudes exist in Thai society as they do elsewhere in the world (see Section 6, Homoerotic, Homosexual, and Bisexual Behaviors).

In summary, we have outlined a number of key belief systems that underlie the gender construction in Thai society: the Theravada gender roles, folk myths and animistic beliefs, and traditional class-relevant ideals, among others. Although diversified in origins, these belief systems share common elements which enable their assembly into a coherent cultural structure. To illustrate, men in general are allowed greater latitude in their sexual and moral conduct, perhaps because religious salvation awaits them as a viable option; the myth of masculinity which associates maleness with vices and sexual freedom, therefore, finds a corresponding solution in the Theravada role for men. Similarly, a consistent dictum about women can be found across these diverse belief systems. A woman's virtue is based on the degree to which she excels in promoting the well-being of religion and family, and it also depends upon her sexual conduct with men. A woman's moral status, therefore, is always relational and conditional. She is either higher or lower than men because of what she does (and does not do) with men. This idea is consistent with the Theravada role for women, the *kulasatrii* code of the female ideal, and a number of practices couched as ways to protect women from men's exploits.

It is noteworthy that the cultural construction determines whether or not a new practice or idea from another cultural origin will "fit" into the prevailing coherent structure. The relatively Western chivalrous manners, for example, have been assimilated into the Thai culture because they correspond to the indigenous notion that women are "noble" yet "weaker," thus needing honoring treatment and protection. The relatively recent rise of commercial sex in Thailand may be an adoption of capitalism, but Thai people have always been familiar in Buddhist tales with prototype women who commoditize sex in dire straits (Keyes 1984). The popularity of female meditation teachers in the 1970s in Bangkok was a unique phenomenon (J. Van Esterik 1982), but the

acceptance seemed to rest upon the perception that these lay teachers, like *mae chii*, would never pursue political or monastic goals. Some Thais did not even see the female meditation teachers as women, because these women did not fit conventional female images. Western feminism has been met with objection as being too radical, unrealistic, or culturally inappropriate, probably because the feminist manifestos do not find much corresponding agenda in the Thai gender construction. While the Thai society is undergoing rapid changes, the fundamental gender construction remains, and it determines which new influences will be selected and which will be discarded. Whatever the result of the transformation may be, the key in predicting the future of gender relations in Thailand lies in unraveling the gender constructions of the past and the present.

2. Religious, Ethnic, and Gender Factors Affecting Sexuality

A. Religious Factors

Buddhism, the Dominant Religious Factor

The main and official religion of Thailand is Theravada Buddhism, with more than 90% of the population following this tradition. The profound influences of Buddhism on gender and sexuality in Thailand are intertwined with Hinduist practice, local animistic beliefs, and popular demonology from ancient times. The predominant animistic belief system involves *phii*, or the spirits, either of ancestral origin or those residing in natural objects. The spirits can inflict illnesses and misfortune upon individuals for deviant conduct, or, on the contrary, they can provide protection, healing, and bring about fortune for those who follow ethics and placate the spirits. In addition, about 4% of the population are Muslim, mostly living in the southern part of Thailand. Christianity has become steadily more popular, and over a century of work by the missionaries can be seen in many schools which offer good education to Thai children without seeking to convert them.

The tolerant philosophy of Buddhism and the constitutional guarantees of religious freedom have provided a fertile ground for adoption and admixing new religious beliefs with traditional beliefs. In the Thai eyes, the superstition and metaphysics in animism, demonology, and Hinduist cosmology are not at odds with the Buddhist cosmology depicted in the Buddhist canon and religious folk tales. These strands of belief systems maintain peaceful coexistence, and many Thais follow some of these practices to a certain degree during different parts of their lives.

Although the guidelines to achieve *nirvana* are offered, Buddhism emphasizes to the laity "the middle way" and the importance of avoiding extremism. This pragmatic approach is also seen in the domain of sexuality. Despite the deprecation of sexuality in the ideal Buddhism, celibacy is likely to be pertinent only to the monastic lifestyle, while diverse sexual expression has been tolerated among the lay followers, especially the men for whom sexual, military, and social prowess has always been extolled (Cabezón 1993). The Five Precepts are guidelines for lay Buddhists "for a socially-just life, free of exploitation of oneself and others." Again, pragmatism prevails: All of the Precepts are not rigidly expected in most lay Buddhists in Thailand (as well as in other Buddhist cultures) except for the elderly or extraordinarily pious laypersons (Cabezón 1993).

The Third Buddhist Precept specifically addresses human sexuality: Refrain from sexual misconduct or "wrong doing in sexual matters." Although being open to various interpretations, depending on the different contexts, malfeasance is usually considered by Thai people to mean adultery,

rape, sexual abuse of children, and careless sexual activities that result in the sorrow of others (Allyn 1991). Premarital sex, prostitution, masturbation, cross-gendered behavior, and homosexuality, on the other hand, are not explicitly mentioned. Any objection to some of these sexual phenomena is perhaps grounded in other non-Buddhist beliefs, such as classism, animism, or Western medical theories. In subsequent sections, we will present further discussions on the Buddhist attitudes toward homosexuality (Section 6, Homosexual, Homosexual, and Bisexual Behaviors) and commercial sex (Section 8B, Significant Unconventional Sexual Behaviors, Prostitution).

Gender Roles in Theravada Buddhism and Their Implications

Many ideal images for men and women are found in religious folk tales, which the monks read or retell during sermons (*thetsana*). These sermons, although rarely translated from the Buddhist canon (*Tripitaka* or *Phra Trai-pidok* in Thai), are taken by most Thais as the authentic teachings of the Buddha (Keyes 1984). Similarly, other ritual traditions, folk operas, and local legends contain gender-relevant images in the depiction of men and women's lives, both sovereign and common, showing their sins and merits through their actions and relationships, all of which purportedly convey Buddhist messages. Thereby, the Theravada worldview, both authentic and interpreted through the Thai eyes, has exerted enormous influences on the gender construction in Thailand.

With a firm belief in *karma* and reincarnation, Thai people are concerned with accumulating merit in everyday life in order to attain an enhanced status in rebirth rather than striving for *nirvana* (Kirsch 1982). Earning merit and an enhanced rebirth status are depicted in the story of Prince Vessantara (or *Phra Vessandon* in Thai pronunciation), who is reborn in his next life as the historic Buddha because of his unconditional generosity expressed by giving away his valuables, including his wealth, children, and wife. In real life, men and women "make merit," and the Theravada culture prescribes different ways for this quest. The ideal "merit making" for men is through ordination in the *Sangha* (order of monks, or in Thai, *Phra Song*). Women, on the other hand, are not allowed to be ordained. Although the order of *Bhikkhuni* (the female equivalent to the *Sangha* monks) was established by the Buddha with some reluctance, the practice disappeared from Sri Lanka and India after several centuries and never existed in Southeast Asia (Keyes 1984; P. Van Esterik 1982). Today, laywomen can intensify their Buddhist practice by becoming *mae chii* (often erroneously translated to "nun"). These are lay female ascetics who shave their heads and wear white robes. Although *mae chii* abstain from worldly pleasures and sexuality, the laity consider giving alms to *mae chii* a lesser merit-making activity than alms given to the monks. Hence, these women usually depend on themselves and/or on their relatives for the necessities of life. Obviously, *mae chii* are not as highly regarded as monks, and indeed many *mae chii* are even perceived negatively (P. Van Esterik 1982).

The fact that the Buddhist religious roles for women are underdeveloped has led Kirsch (1985) to comment that women in Theravada societies are "religiously disadvantaged." Conventionally, the exclusion of women from monastic roles has been rationalized by the view that women are less ready than men to attain the Buddhist salvation because of their deeper enmeshment in worldly matters. Instead, women's greatest contribution to Buddhism lies in their secular role through enabling the religious pursuit for the men in their lives. Hence, the role for women in religion is characterized by the mother-nurturer image: Women sup-

port and provide for Buddhism by way of "giving" young men to the *Sangha*, and "nurturing" the religion by alms giving (Keyes 1984). The ways in which Thai women constantly support Buddhist institutions and contribute to various spiritual functions in their communities have been well illustrated in Penny Van Esterik's work (1982).

This mother-nurturer image is also prominent in the Thai women's secular pursuits. Women are expected to provide for the well-being of their husbands, children, and parents. As pointed out by Kirsch (1985), this historical mother-nurturer role has had a self-perpetuating effect on the exclusion of women from monastic roles. Because women are barred from the monastic position, and because the weight of filial and family obligations falls more on women than on men, women are doubly locked in the same secular mother-nurturer role with no other options. They, therefore, are indeed enmeshed in worldly matters, and their redemption lies in the actions of the men in their lives.

Two important religious texts illustrate this condition. In the tale of Prince Vessantara, his wife, Queen Maddi, is praised because of her unconditional support of his generosity. In *Anisong Buat* ("Blessings of Ordination"), a woman with no merit is saved from hell because she had allowed her son to be ordained as a monk (Keyes 1984). In reality, the mother-nurturer image entails a certain life path for women, as noted by Kirsch (1985, 319): "Under typical circumstances young women could expect to remain rooted in village life, eventually snaring a husband, having children, and 'replacing' their mothers."

Men, as seen in the depiction of Prince Vessantara and the young son with religious aspirations in the "Blessings of Ordination," are afforded autonomy, as well as geographic and social mobility, to pursue both religious and secular goals, therefore "affirming" the conventional wisdom that men are more ready than women to give up attachments.

Undoubtedly, these differential role prescriptions for men and women have led to a clear division of labor along gender lines. Thai women's role of mother and their routine merit-making activities necessitate their specialization in economic-entrepreneurial activities, such as small-scale trading, productive activities in the field, and craft work at home. Thai men, encouraged by the logistic freedom, prefer political-bureaucratic activities, particularly those in government service (Kirsch 1982). The connection between monastic institutions and polity has always been salient to Thai people (see Kirsch 1982; J. Van Esterik 1982), therefore, positions in bureaucracy and politics represent a man's ideal pursuit should he choose to excel in the secular role. In the 19th century, more Thai men began to strive for secular success when the Buddhist reformation in Thailand demanded more intensified discipline in monks; this coincided with an expansion of government occupations that resulted from a bureaucratic system reorganization in the 1890s (Kirsch 1982).

Becoming a temporary member of the monkhood has long been seen in Thailand as a rite of passage which demarcates Thai men's transformation from "raw" to "ripe," or from immature men to scholars or wise men (*bundit*, from Pali *pandit*). In Sathian Kosed's *Popular Buddhism in Thailand* (published in Rajadon 1961), young Buddhist men, upon turning 20 years old, are expected to become a monk for the period of about three months during the Buddhist Lenten period. Because the merit from ordination of a married man will be transferred to his wife (and because she must consent to his ordination), parents are understandably anxious to see that their sons are ordained before they get married. Traditionally, a "raw" unordained adult man would be seen as uneducated and, therefore, not a suitable man to be a husband or son-in-law. The man's girlfriend or fiancée,

therefore, delights in his temporary monkhood as it should enhance her parents' approval of him. She often sees this as a sign of relationship commitment, and promises to wait patiently for the day he leaves his monkhood at the end of the Lenten period. In Thai society today, this practice of ordination has changed and is less significant, as men are more involved in secular education or occupied by their employment. Statistics show that today, members of the *Sangha* account for a smaller percent of the male population than in earlier times (Keyes 1984). As early as the late 1940s, when Sathian Kosed wrote *Popular Buddhism in Thailand*, there were already some signs of weakening customs around the Buddhist ordination.

Many other phenomena related to gender and sexuality in Thailand today can be traced to the Theravada worldview. As will be more evident in subsequent discussions, the Thai culture exhibits a double standard, which gives men a greater latitude to express their sexuality and other "deviant" behaviors (e.g., drinking, gambling, and extramarital sex). Keyes (1984) has pointed out that whereas women are seen as inherently close to the Buddha's teachings about sufferings, men require the discipline of ordination in order to achieve this insight, for they tend to digress from the Buddhist Precepts. With Keyes' notion in mind, we can speculate that Thai men perceive that demeritorious behaviors can be amended through their eventual ordination. Up to 70% of all men in central Thailand become monks on a temporary basis (J. Van Esterik 1982). Other adult males renounce "worldly" living to be ordained to the *Sangha*, living a midlife or old age "robed in yellow" as is commonly said in Thai. With such redemptive options, Thai men may feel little need to suppress their passions and vices. These attachments are, after all, easy to give up and are insubstantial compared to the salvation available to them in their twilight years.

On the contrary, women's lack of access to direct religious salvation makes them work harder to maintain virtuous lives, which means refraining from and disapproving of sexual indulgences, in order to keep their demerit to a minimum. With no access to formal Buddhist scholastic activities, it is unlikely that women would be able to discern which virtues and sins were defined by the Theravada values and which by the local gender construction (see discussion of *kulasatrii* in Section 1A, Basic Sexological Premises, Ideal Gender Images). Further, because women believe that their strongest merit is to be a mother of a son who is ordained, the pressure on women to marry and have a family is heightened. They must do everything to enhance their likelihood of marriage, perhaps including adherence to the ideal female images no matter how difficult. Viewed this way, both men and women in Thai society strongly endorse a double standard regarding gender and sexuality, albeit for different reasons.

Key Beliefs in the Thai Constructions of Gender and Sexuality

Before we proceed to other topics, it may be helpful to summarize the key strands of worldviews which will be apparent in subsequent discussions of gender and sexuality in Thailand. The most important influences are religious belief systems. Not only do the Five Buddhist Precepts constitute the ethical guidelines for laypeople, the Theravada gender images have been passed on to the society through sermons, folk tales and operas, and rituals. Animistic and Hinduist beliefs are embedded in the Thai consciousness through these folk tales, as is evident in metaphysical cosmology and entities, angels and ghosts, heavens and hells.

Other influences can also be identified in contemporary Thai society. For example, the consumerist and capitalist

ideology is evident in commercial sex and pornography industries. More recently added to the mix is the newer generation's perception of sexuality in contemporary Europe, North America, and Japan, often interpreted as "modern," liberal, or hedonistic. Another school of thought present in the educated, urban middle class is the Western medical models of diseases and deviance, as well as psychological theories of sexuality; the Thai translations for "the subconscious," "latent," or "ego" are not uncommon in the conversation among the educated. Among other members of the same social strata, one can also discern the rise of contemporary Western ideological and political movements, such as feminism, women's studies, and the gay/lesbian identity. In a similar vein, the humanistic approach to understanding sexuality has become more visible in recent years, although it is often mislabeled as "modern," "Western," or "radical." Unfortunately, the humanistic movement may suffer from such misrepresentations in the present cultural climate, in which Thai tradition is seen as threatened by Western influences, and many Thai intellectuals are paying lip service to the conservation of traditional Thai identity.

B. Ethnic Differences and Social Structure

Today, there are four regions of Thailand with distinct cultures: the north, the northeast, the central area, and the south. Although regional and cultural differences exist, there is a strong national identity, and the central Thai language is taught and understood throughout the country. This is enhanced by a well-developed mass media and communications system, a good telephone service, and a reliable transportation system servicing all parts of the country. The only exception to this is the hill tribe people in the mountainous regions that surround northern Thailand. The hill tribe people migrated south from China and have remained relatively separate and distinct. However, as the government cracks down on the growing of poppies (for opium and heroin production) and deforestation, the hill tribe people have been moving into the lowlands of Thailand or, through better roads and transportation, commute regularly into the lowland cities for work. Hill tribe people have maintained their own languages, cultures, and customs in the past several centuries. More details on the lives of hill tribe populations can be found in the books edited by Nancy Eberhardt (1988) and McKinnon and Bhruksasri (1983).

Other cultural differences also exist. The stratification of upper, middle, and lower classes is mostly based on the past social hierarchy (*sakdi na*) and the family's financial powers. This social stratification is no longer enforced by contemporary law, but its presence is recognized by most Thais. There is also a distinction between urban and rural Thais. Constituting a majority of the Thai population, people in the rural villages of Thailand have led more-simple lives rooted in rich traditions, with less interference from international cultures or capitalism. Urban Thailand, on the other hand, has gained its cultural richness from the diverse social classes, ethnicities, and international cultures. The rural/urban division is still highly salient to most Thais, even though the differences have become gradually smaller because of the media, improved communication and transportation, and the migration of rural Thais to find work in big cities. Among other changes, gender and sexuality in rural villagers today have been greatly adulterated by the urban cultural images through the ubiquitous popular media (Keyes 1984).

In addition, there is also an ethnic division between the Thais and the 10% of the population who are of Chinese descent. Mostly excluded from the upper echelons of nobility, Sino-Thai people have gained power and status through commerce. The ethnic Chinese in Thailand have managed to

blend well into the urban middle-class communities with particularly great contributions in commerce and, more recently, the sciences, while still maintaining their traditional heritage through customs and Confucian family values. Despite the longstanding tradition of classes, social mobility is common, and the ethnic Chinese stand as examples of “rags-to-riches” possibilities (Kirsch 1982). Racial prejudice exists on a subtle level, but has never resulted in overt segregation or violence, even during the anti-Chinese nationalistic government in 1939. Readers who are interested in the lives of Chinese and Sino-Thai peoples in Thailand are referred to the work of Anne Maxwell Hill (1988) and William Skinner (1957).

It is important to bear in mind these cultural, regional, and ethnic differences, because they significantly limit generalizations about the sexual attitudes and values in Thailand. In this chapter, a majority of the research data on sexual attitudes and behavior has been derived from samples of lower- and middle-class ethnic Thais. Most empirical studies have been conducted in urban cities, such as Bangkok and Chiang-mai, although data from the rural villages of the north and the northeast account for a considerable portion of our review. In addition, Thailand’s rapid economic progress in recent decades has had a dramatic impact on every level of sociocultural structures. Likewise, the nature of gender and sexuality in Thai society is undergoing rapid transformations. As a result, the great degree of flux and heterogeneity in Thai society demands that we pay great attention to the contexts in our attempt to understand gender and sexuality in Thailand.

3. Knowledge and Education about Sexuality

Like parents in many other cultures, most Thai parents do not educate their children about sexuality, and when children ask about sex, they are likely to avoid answering or they provide incorrect information. Since parents are unlikely to display affection in front of their children, role-modeling of affection between the genders is usually derived not from parents, but from literature or the media. Men are more likely to discuss sex with other men, especially when they are socializing and drinking with each other. Women also prefer to discuss sex and their marital issues with their same-gender peers (Thorbeck 1988). Sexual communication between a married couple has received much attention among Thai sex and AIDS researchers recently, but data are still scarce (see Section 5B, Interpersonal Heterosexual Behaviors, Adult Sexual Behavior).

Sexual matters are not typically discussed in a serious fashion in the Thai society. When sex is mentioned, it is often in the context of playful banter or humor. Playful joking about sex with striking curiosity and candor is not uncommon. For example, a newlywed couple would be teased lightheartedly and openly: “Did you have fun last night? Was last night happy? How many times?” (Allyn 1991). As in many cultures, Thai people have an extensive sexual vocabulary (see Allyn 1991). For every colloquialism that Thai people find offensive or obscene, there are a number of euphemistic equivalents. Euphemistic substitutes are made by way of symbolic animals or objects (e.g., “dragon” or “dove” for penis, “oyster” for vagina, and “eggs” for testicles); children’s language (e.g., “little kid” or “Mr. That” for penis); extreme obscurity (e.g., “said activity” for having sex, “using mouth” for oral sex, and “Miss Body” for prostitute); literary references (e.g., “Lord of the world” for penis); or medical terms (e.g., “birth canal” for vagina).

With such a variety of alternative terms, Thai people feel that sexual matters in everyday conversation should be tastefully alluded to in moderate amounts, with an artful choice of

words, timing, and comic sensibility. Thai people do have a strict sense of social appropriateness surrounding such humor, especially in the presence of elders or women. Discussions about sex are uncomfortable when they are excessively crude or straightforward, overly solemn or intellectual, and socially inappropriate. Such discomfort is reflected in the Thai words which are equivalent to “one-track mind,” “dirty mind,” “lewd,” “sex-obsessed,” “sex-crazed,” or “nympho” in English, with a variety of nuances ranging from playful to pathologizing to disapproving. Such attitudes have been one of the barriers for sexuality education; rather than objecting to content of sexuality education *per se*, adults and educators feel embarrassed by discussions about sex that seem too intellectual and straightforward.

Sexuality education was introduced in Thai schools in 1978. Although the curriculum has been revised over the years, it has been limited to reproductive issues and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). As in many other countries, sexuality education in Thailand has been rarely taught in a comprehensive manner. Embedded in the contexts of health education and biology, attention to sociocultural contexts was more an exception than a rule. Although family planning and population control is practiced by most Thais, contraception is not emphasized in school. Instead, a typical Thai gains this knowledge from family planning media campaigns, clinics, and physicians.

Dusitsin (1995) has expressed concerns that Thai people can no longer rely on learning about sex from sexual humor, which contains alarming amounts of sexual myths and misinformation. Dusitsin’s proposal of a Program for the Promotion of Sexual Health (see Sections 12, Sexual Dysfunctions, Counseling, and Therapies, and 13, Research and Advanced Education) gives a priority to developing curricula for sexuality education for both students and non-student populations. Other Thai researchers and experts have voiced the same philosophy and have called for more comprehensive curricula, with greater coverage of psychosocial issues, such as a discourse on gender, homophobia, and sexual commercialism. They have also urged that sexuality education must have its own identity and objectives clearly distinguished from the highly visible AIDS-prevention campaigns, in order to avoid the constricted scope and sex-negative attitudes. Others have also enthusiastically supported the idea of covering non-student populations, who usually have limited access to services and education.

4. Autoerotic Behaviors and Patterns

Very few of the sex surveys conducted in the wake of the HIV epidemic have reported any data about the incidence of masturbation, let alone discussed the attitudes and behaviors surrounding this behavior. This may be because of the fact that masturbation, like most other sexual matters, is somewhat a taboo subject in Thailand, and has been ignored perhaps because it does not have a direct bearing on the public-health agenda.

One study did examine adolescent autoerotic attitudes and behaviors (Chompootaweep, Yamarat, Poomsuwan, & Dusitsin 1991). Many more male students (42%) than female students (6%) reported having masturbated. The modal age of first masturbatory experience was 13 years. Adolescents were likely to maintain negative attitudes about masturbation, viewing it as “unnatural,” or citing myths about masturbation, such as a belief that it causes sexually transmitted diseases. The gender difference found in the rates of reported masturbation is striking, although it is also typical of other domains in sexual surveys in Thailand. Within the same socioeconomic stratum, Thai men

always report having much more sexual interest and experience than Thai women. Young women, in particular, might be uncomfortable with the idea of masturbation because it is an acknowledgment of sexual curiosity, which is deemed inappropriate and shameful for women (Ford & Kittisuksathit 1994).

Data on the masturbatory experiences of adults are also scarce. In one study of army conscripts in northern Thailand, 89% of the men (age 21) reported having masturbated (Nopkesorn, Sungkarom, & Sornlum 1991). There is little or no formal information on adults' attitudes about masturbation, but the myths held by adults are likely to be different from those of adolescents. One common myth among male adults is that men are endowed with a finite number of orgasms, thus it is advisable to indulge in masturbation in moderation.

Perhaps the general attitudes of Thai people regarding masturbation can be inferred from the terms used to describe the act. The formal Thai terminology for masturbation, *sumrej khuam khrai duay tua eng*, which simply means "to consummate sexual desire by yourself," has replaced a former technical term *atta-kaam-kiriya*, which means "sexual act with oneself." The tone of these rather clinical and inconvenient terms is neutral, strictly free of judgment or implications about health consequences. There is really no clear discussion about masturbation, either positive or negative, in the Third Buddhist Precept or in animistic practice. Therefore, any disapproval of masturbation in the Thai society is likely to be a result of the general anxiety surrounding sexual indulgences, or perhaps from the Western anachronism introduced to the Thai thinking by way of past medical education.

Most Thais, however, prefer the playful vernacular *chak wov*, meaning to "fly a kite." The term compares male masturbation to the hand action of flying a kite, a popular Thai pastime. An even more euphemistic term for male masturbation is *pai sa-naam luang*, which means "to go to the grand field," referring to the very popular park area near the royal palace in Bangkok where people fly kites. For women, the slang term *tok bed* is used, meaning "to use a fishing pole." These playful and euphemistic expressions reflect the acknowledgment that masturbation occurs for both men and women, and yet some discomfort prevents a straightforward verbal expression.

5. Interpersonal Heterosexual Behaviors

A. Adolescent Sexual Behavior

Numerous studies up to the mid-1990s have shown that about half of Thai men have sexual intercourse before they are 18 years old, and that most of them have their first experience with a commercial sex worker (e.g., Sittitrai, Phanuphak, Barry, & Brown 1992; Udomratn & Tungphaisal 1990). Justified as a way of preserving the virtue of "good women," Thai adolescents seek premarital sexual experience from commercial sex workers. Prior to the HIV epidemic, there was virtually no stigma attached to this practice. Sex with a sex worker has often been considered a rite of passage and an accepted manner of learning about sex for young men. Some Thai fathers were known to pay sex workers to have sex with their sons as a way of giving their youngsters some sex education or acknowledging their adulthood. In primarily male colleges, senior students welcomed freshmen, most of whom had no prior sexual experience, by accompanying them to the local brothel or bars/cafes which offer commercial sex. In the contemporary Thai society where increasingly fewer men are interested in the *Sangha*, the young men's use of sexual intercourse as a rite of passage seems like a symbolic commen-

tary on how the male image has drifted further away from the monastic role in the direction of worldliness.

Thai male adolescents eagerly look forward to their first intercourse and, as its slang term (*khuen khruu*) roughly implies, a learning process with someone sexually experienced. For many young Thai men, this practice continues beyond their first sexual experience, and commercial sex becomes a bachelor's recreation. In fact, the phrase *pai thiow*, meaning "to go out for fun," is a euphemism for a visit to the brothel. Going to a brothel with friends is a social as well as a sexual experience, often occurring after an evening of drinking or social gathering. Young men who do not seem interested in joining their peers at a brothel are sometimes teased for being homosexual (Ford & Kittisuksathit 1994). This pattern of sexual behavior in young Thai men will be confirmed by more findings reviewed in the section on the premarital sex of adults (see Section 5B, Interpersonal Heterosexual Behaviors, Adult Sexual Behavior).

On the other hand, young women are supposed to be virgins until they are married. Sex is thus not a recreational option for unmarried women as it is for men. Violation of this rule occurs in the cases of prostitutes and "carefree women." A "carefree woman," or an unmarried woman who seeks sexual pleasure from casual partners, is stereotyped as shallow, emotionally disturbed, and self-destructive. She presumably has lost her virginity because she was amoral, careless, gullible, or blindly following the Western code of sexual behavior. Needless to say, sex before marriage for women is the key criterion that distinguishes a "bad woman" from a "good woman." Female sex workers are subject to the same stereotype, but perhaps to a lesser degree, possibly because they are perceived to be forced into commercial sex by poverty. In addition, the *kulasatrii* notion mostly pertains to the upper and middle classes (Pyne 1994), and thus has less to do with the lower-class origin of most sex workers. Despite such class difference, the *kulasatrii* status is much like the Buddhist concept of merit in that it is based on the person's conduct, not on the social standing *per se*, and it is subject to decline for any transgression. Inasmuch as social mobility and merit accumulation are afforded everyone in Thailand (although perhaps not with equal ease), every woman, every *kulasatrii* can fall from grace if her conduct is compromised. Therefore, gender segregation, the stringent rules of *kulasatrii*, and strict parental supervision all are useful mechanisms for maintaining the virtue of "good" women.

In keeping with the value on women's virginity, the Thai culture prescribes that romantic relationships between young men and women must be without sex. In general, young people in Thailand today choose their own romantic partner, although parents exercise sanctions on their choice and limit their premarital sexual interaction (Ford & Kittisuksathit 1994). As a man and a woman enter a purely romantic premarital relationship, they are known as being each other's *fan*, an originally English term used in Thai with a different connotation. When in a relationship, many young women start to act as if they are practicing the traditional gender script of husband and wife (without the sex) by adopting a more submissive and deferential role with their *fan*. Even under such a nonsexual premise, many young Thai lovers are still very reluctant to reveal that they have a *fan* to parents or adults for fear of disapproval. In the conservative middle-class ethic, romantic interest is inappropriate for adolescents because they cannot support themselves. Many young lovers simply refer to their *fan* as a male or a female friend. This reluctance to disclose romantic relationships remains in many married adults, who refer to a spouse as a *fan* even after years of marriage.

In an exceptional study of adolescence, Chompootaweep et al. (1991) randomly surveyed secondary-level schools in Bangkok and collected questionnaires from 4,337 students (mean age = 14.7) and 454 teachers. Both male and female students reported that the best age to develop a romantic relationship was 18 to 20 years of age, in contrast to the ages 21 to 25, which their teachers thought was the appropriate age to start romantic relationships. This demonstrates the intergenerational difference in attitude toward adolescent romantic relationships; Thai teachers, like Thai parents, see romance between adolescents as precocious and inappropriate. Fifty-five percent of the male students subscribed to the idea that men should have some sexual experience before getting married, while only 24% of the female students thought this was appropriate for men. Among the teachers, 74% of the male teachers and 58% of the female teachers endorsed men's premarital sexual experience. A double standard was clearly illustrated, as only 15% of both male and female participants endorsed premarital sex for women. In terms of sexual behavior, 12% of the male students and only 1% of the female students reported having had intercourse.

These observations have been further confirmed in another excellent study (Ford & Kittisuksathit 1994) which we have cited throughout this chapter. In this study, qualitative data were obtained from focus groups with young factory workers (ages 15 to 24) whose socioeconomic status was more representative of the general Thai youth populations than high-school or college samples. Sexual desire was perceived by both young men and women to be a male attribute. The young men openly expressed their sexual feelings and experiences; the young women felt ashamed of their sexual curiosity and thought women should wait until they were older and married before they found out about sex. In the minds of the young men, sexual intercourse seemed like an adventure, a gain, a forceful act, or an act of satisfying one's greed. Some slang terms used by the young men for sexual intercourse can be roughly translated to "taking," "earning," "playing," "grinding," "gobbling," and "poking the yolk." On the contrary, sexual intercourse was seen by the young women as a loss of their body/self (*sia tua*), and women who have lost their virginity were seen as "impure," "soiled," or "tarnished." In addition, there is a belief that a forbidden sexual experience can predispose a young woman to becoming sexually out of control, (*jai taek*), especially if the liaison ends with the man deserting her. Such a woman might turn into a "carefree woman" or even a prostitute (Thorbeck 1988).

In addition to demonstrating a double standard among Thai adolescents, Chompootaweep et al. (1991) also found that the gender and sexual attitudes of Thais in the same urban environment differed as a function of their ages. The young factory workers in Ford and Kittisuksathit's study (1994) pointedly articulated this sense of being in the midst of social transformation. Repeatedly referring to "[things are] different today," these adolescents were acutely aware of their living in a period in which sexual constructions were rapidly changing from the clear prescriptions of the "traditional" norms to the more amorphous and perplexing "modern" ways.

B. Adult Sexual Behavior

Premarital and Adult Sexual Experience

The *Survey of Partner Relations and HIV Infection* (Sittitrai et al., 1992; referred to hereafter as "the *Partner Relations Survey*") is a large population-based study that examined sexual attitudes and behaviors among 2,801 men and women. Currently married men reported an average of 30.2 premarital sexual partners. Never-married men reported an average of 14.3 premarital sexual partners. The picture was completely different for women, who reported

little or no premarital sexual experiences, with means of 0.03 and 0.01 premarital sexual partners for married women and never-married women, respectively. This gender difference again reflects a double standard on premarital sex for men and women. Although the extent of reporting biases could not be determined, as in most sex surveys, the social-desirability biases could have influenced men to overreport and/or women to underreport their premarital sexual experiences. The biases, if there were any, did indeed reflect the double standard that promotes premarital sex in men and discourages it in women.

Many researchers have studied Thai military conscripts in order to describe the sexual behaviors of the general populations of young Thai men. Thai men ages 20 to 22, who are not in higher education, are inducted to the Royal Thai Army by lottery; randomly selected samples, therefore, provide an excellent representation of men in the lower socioeconomic strata of Thai society (Beyer, Eiumtrakul, Celentano, Nelson, Ruckphaopunt, & Khamboonruang 1995). In a study of conscripts from northern Thailand in 1990 and 1991 (Nopkesorn et al. 1991), 97% of these 21-year-old men reported having had sexual intercourse, with about 54% reporting having the first intercourse before the age of 16. The first sexual intercourse for 74% of the men was with a female sex worker, compared to 12% with a lover, and 8% with a girlfriend. A majority of men, 90%, had had sex with a female sex worker, mostly starting between the ages of 15 to 18. By the age of 16, about half of the sample had had their first visit to a female sex worker.

Until AIDS became a widespread anxiety in the mid-1990s, commercial sex had been the primary sexual outlet for Thai bachelors, justified as a means of protecting virtuous Thai women from premarital sex. For Thai male adults, the use of commercial sex continues in the same way as it began in adolescence (see Section 5A, *Interpersonal Heterosexual Behaviors, Adolescent Sexual Behavior*), only with less economic restriction. Taking care of men's sexual needs by offering services from a sex worker is considered part of hospitality in many business dealings. Upon arrival in a new city, traveling men or male tourists often make a point of visiting local brothels or erotic massage parlors as local attractions.

This picture may, however, be changing with a new generation of Thais because of several factors. Young women have been found to be more likely to engage in premarital sexual activity than the previous generations. Western culture, as perceived and interpreted through the Thai eyes, has been implicated in this change over the last few decades. More recently, it has also been attributed to the men's heightened fear of HIV. As prevention campaigns have publicized high rates of HIV infection among female sex workers, Thai men have become more wary of visiting professional sex workers. For example, a decrease in the use of commercial sex workers among the northern Thai conscripts, for example, has been documented over the few years prior to 1996 (Nelson et al. 1996).

In response to the worries about AIDS and commercial sex, Thai men have turned to a number of other ways of fulfilling their sexual desires. While many Thai men have become less sexually active, others, especially those in the urban middle-class settings, have been paying for sex with non-professional sex workers who are not in the sex establishments. Others turn to the big-city singles or nightlife scenes for casual sex with pickup partners. Finally, there is a growing number of men who have sex with their girlfriends in the context of a committed romantic relationship. Helped by the anonymity of big cities and the widely available contraceptive methods, there are increasing number of cohabiting couples, much to the chagrin of conservatives who are concerned

with the virtue of Thai women. Although this phenomenon has been consistently observed in recent studies (e.g., Nelson et al. 1996), many researchers feel that there is much resistance from the Thai public, who are not quite ready to formally approve of these unmarried sexual couples.

Thai women, not unlike those in many other cultures, take risks in having sexual experience. In addition to concerns about pregnancy and health, they face the risks of stigmatization for losing their virginity outside a marriage. As many sex workers have reported, because an unmarried woman's virtue is eminently tied to her virginity, a woman who has lost her virginity has nothing to lose in choosing the path of commercial sex (Thorbeck 1988). Other women keep their premarital sexual experience a secret, although the psychological repercussions may continue. A small number of women who are neither secretive nor disturbed by their premarital sex are suspected to have had a "bad influence" from Western culture, or are pathologized as sensation-seeking, promiscuous, or morally corrupt (see the "bad girl" stereotype in Section 5A, Interpersonal Heterosexual Behaviors, Adolescent Sexual Behavior). The expressions which characterize women who seek sexual gratification with little restraint are *jai ngaai* ("feeble mind/heart"), and *jai taek* ("broken mind/heart"), suggesting that the women are morally corrupt or out of control. Together, the non-professional women who exchange sex for money and the "carefree" single women in the urban nightlife and singles scenes are categorized as *ying ruk sanuk*, or "fun-loving women," or the slang *kai long*, or "stray chicken." These "depraved" women are seen as "only good for sex but not suitable for being the mother of your children."

In spite of the blame on Western influence, the image of "bad" women who seek sexual pleasures is not new. Kirsch (1985) has observed that in the 19th century, King Mongkut characterized "spinsters and divorcees" as "artful women" who viewed monks as "fattened hogs" (i.e., potential husbands); monks exposed to such women's seduction "are likely to be driven crazy by their new found love" (p. 311). Similarly, Penny Van Esterik (1982) has found that some lay villagers were suspicious of *mae chii* (female ascetics) who lived near the temples in which monks resided. She further cites a story recorded by Attagara about a woman who dressed up as a *mae chii* and seduced a local abbot who was so ashamed of his weakness that he held his breath and died. A line in the *Jataka* tales (tales about the Buddha's past lives) says that "Women desire rich lovers like cows seeking new pastures" (p. 76). These illustrations suggest that women who did not fit the model of motherhood, like unmarried women, divorcees, or *mae chii*, might have always been viewed with suspicion, with a projection of the male-typical boundless and uncontrollable sexual desires on to them.

In addition to the well-known "bad woman" stereotype and the *kulasatrii* ideal, there is yet another type of women in the Thai consciousness, namely the widows. (Although this word in Thai can also refer to divorced women, this discussion pertains only to women whose husbands are deceased). Mostly of middle- and lower-class social strata, many widows seem to be less bound by the conservatism of a *kulasatrii*, yet they are not stigmatized as depraved. Because a widow presumably has had sexual experience in her prior marriage, virginity no longer is an issue of virtue for her. Therefore, she can seek sexual pleasure without severe social stigma, given that, of course, scandals such as affairs with married men or pregnancy out of wedlock are avoided. With the exception of female sex workers, widows seem to be the only women in Thai society "allowed" to have sex outside of marriage. In literature, jokes, and popular song lyrics, widows are portrayed as temptresses: straightfor-

ward about their sexual interest—often toward younger men—witty and flirtatious, exuberantly sensual and seductive, and well versed in their sexual practices. To many heterosexual male adolescents, an idealized fantasy of their first sexual experience is an encounter with such a woman who is sexually disinhibited, yet not a sex worker. The Thai culture seems to have an alternative for a woman to be sexually active with fewer reservations, but she needs to have lost a husband who had introduced her to the joy of sex.

Marriage and Family Dynamics

Choice of a marriage mate is usually based on the individual's preference. Thai women have greater power in their spouse selection than do Chinese-Thai women in Thailand (Pyne 1994). Elopements are also, however, well known, indicating the power of parental objection (Kirsch 1982). A married couple may reside for a time with the wife's family, but their ideal residence is an independent nuclear household. In extended families, the strong matrilineal ties generally entail men's moving into the woman's family. Well-known exceptions to this custom exist, especially among the ethnic Chinese in Thailand as exemplified in the work with Yunnanese families by Hill (1988). With the couple establishing an independent household in the wife's family compound, both usually continue to work the land owned by the wife's parents, with the son-in-law's labor construed as a form of brideprice. Despite such a matrilocal pattern of postnuptial residence, authority is passed down through the men in the family, and the son-in-law eventually becomes the head of the household (Pyne 1994).

Women maintain strong connections with their mothers, even when migration and poverty make contacts difficult (Thorbeck 1982). Women working in cities often send money to their families upcountry, visit them annually, and most return to the villages when their target income is achieved (Pyne 1994) or when their employment or marriage ends.

A traditional Thai marriage is symbolized by tying the bride and groom's wrists with holy string during a ceremony at which the family and community are present (Pyne 1994). A woman changes her surname to her husband's upon marriage and her title changes from *naangsao* ("Miss") to *naang* ("Missus"). In addition to the informal gender-neutral *fan*, a variety of terms for husband and wife exist for use in different contexts, ranging from the playful and frank (*phua* for husband, and *mia* for wife) to the formal and polite (*saamii* for husband, and *phan-ya* for wife). There is a slight discomfort with the frank terms for husband and wife, and most Thai people see the formal, legal, slightly detached terms as more civilized and polite. The importance of the couple's image as parents can be seen in the endearing terms for husband and wife, *pho baan* and *mae baan* (father and mother of the home). In fact, the birth of the first child is a critical event for a traditional Thai couple, as it denotes the union and symbolizes a stable relationship (Pyne 1994). Although a preference for having sons has been documented elsewhere (e.g., P. Van Esterik 1982), and it is particularly strong in the Chinese-Thai families, both sons and daughters are valued for different reasons. While the son's potential ordination in the *Sangha* can accumulate merit for the parents (Rajadon 1961), a daughter is viewed as being reliable and dependable, especially for the care of parents in old age (Pyne 1994). Data from the *Demographic and Health Survey* (cited in Pyne 1994) indicate that half of all married women (ages 15 to 49) intend to have two children, and 80% want two or three.

The nurturing responsibilities of contemporary Thai women are undeniable in the statistics of women who work outside of their homes, as well as the proportions of women among migrants and the workforce (see Pyne 1994). Em-

ployers consider female workers to be hard working, enthusiastic, loyal, patient, and attentive to detail. Interestingly, centuries ago, the same qualities in Thai women did not escape the eyes of foreign observers. In the 17th century, Simon La Loubère (1693, quoted in Kirsch 1982, 16) noted on his visit to Siam: “how lazy the ordinary life of the Siamese [commoner] is . . . he does almost nothing but continue sitting or lying, playing, smoking, and sleeping.” In contrast, he observed that the Siamese women “plow the land, they sell and buy in the cities”; and “The women . . . are always busy . . . trafficking in the bazaars, doing the light work in the fields and marketing.” Similarly, a Chinese visitor to Siam during the Ming dynasty observed that “when there are affairs to be settled [in Siam,] they are settled by women. In determination and judgment the women really surpass the men” (Kirsch 1988, 27).

In Thai households today, men are typically the main source of income in a married couple. Major decisions of allocating resources thus remain in the hands of the men, whereas the women often manage the finances on a day-to-day basis (Pyne 1994; Thorbek 1988). In general, women are often more organized and economical than their husbands. Many women spend much energy trying to keep their husbands’ vices in check with varying degrees of success. Thai women also engage in small homegrown businesses, such as vegetable gardening, market-vendor trading, and fabric weaving, if the family earning from the men is not adequate. Nevertheless, these earning women seem to spend most of their own incomes on the necessities of the family and often give sums of money to their mothers (Thorbek 1988). Similarly, a majority of women in commercial sex businesses send their income to parents, siblings, and other relatives in their native villages (Wawer, Podhisita, Kanungsukkasem, Pramualratana, & McNamara 1996). Thai women take their “nurturer” role seriously and few things can deter them from their mission.

Incidence of Vaginal, Oral, and Anal Sex

Data on the incidence of vaginal, oral, and anal sex among Thai people have been provided by the large-scale *Partner Relations Survey* (Sittitrai et al. 1992). Among sexually experienced participants, vaginal intercourse was by far the most frequent sexual behavior, reported by 99.9% of the male and 99.8% of the female participants. Other sexual behaviors, however, are much more rare: Performing oral intercourse (presumably on the other gender) was reported by only 0.7% of the male and 13% of the female participants. Receiving oral sex was reported by 21% of the male participants and no data were available for the female participants’ experience of receiving oral sex. Receptive anal intercourse was experienced by 0.9% of the male and 2% of the female participants. Insertive anal intercourse was experienced by 4% of the male participants.

The striking rarity of the non-genitogenital sexual acts, especially cunnilingus, among Thai people illustrates some sociocultural constructions that play important roles in the Thai sexuality. Even if reporting biases were operating in these findings, the reluctance toward having or reporting oral sex may suggest some aversion to certain body parts, especially the vagina or anus. As previously mentioned, Thai men’s anxiety about losing dignity or masculinity from performing oral sex on a woman might have been a cultural residue from occultism and superstition of the past (see previous discussion on *mi khruu* in Section 1D, Basic Sexological Premises, Gender in Everyday Life). In addition to this superstitious reasoning, Thais also apply the concepts of social hierarchy and dignity to body parts: Certain parts of the body, such as the head or the face, are associated with personal

honor or integrity, whereas other “inferior” parts, such as the legs, feet, anus, and the female reproductive organs, are associated with impurity and baseness. This belief is still extremely common in Thai society, even among those who are not particularly superstitious. In the updated belief of body hierarchy, the impurity of inferior body parts is associated with germs or crudeness, while violation is framed as poor hygiene or lack of social etiquette.

In social interactions, the body hierarchy prohibits some behaviors, such as raising one’s lower extremities high in the presence of others or touching an older person’s head with one’s hand (or even worse, with one’s foot). In sexual situations, this belief also prevents certain sexual acts. Viewed in this cultural context, one can understand Thai people’s repulsion toward oral or anal sex, as well as other sexual acts, such as oral-anal sex or foot fetishism. In these acts, “lowering” a highly guarded body part (e.g., a man’s face or head) to contact an organ of a much lower order (e.g., feet or a woman’s genitals) can cause damage to the man’s personal integrity and dignity. Many Thais today openly disapprove of these sexual acts as deviant, unnatural, or unsanitary, while others are excited by the lack of inhibition they find in Western erotica.

Perhaps because of the lack of direct public health implications, very few studies have generated data on the sexual behavior within married couples. In a 1981 study, a majority of married Thai women (ages 17 to 65) randomly sampled in Bangkok reported low sexual desire or enjoyment after the birth of their children (Bussaratid, Na Ranong, Boonyaparakob, & Sitasuwan 1981). Frequency of sexual intercourse was once a week or less in 49% of the women. Only 24% reported having orgasm with every intercourse; women 35 years or older reported fewer experiences of orgasm. In another study of female outpatients in 1975, the mean frequency of intercourse was 2.3 per week (Pongthai, Sakornratanakul, & Chaturachinda 1980). Another study examined the sexual behavior in pregnant women ages 17 to 44 in Bangkok and found that sexual abstinence increased as pregnancy progressed, ranging from 4% of the women in the first trimester to 56% of the women in the third trimester (Aribarg, Aribarg, Rakiti, & Hamroongroj 1982). The most common reasons for abstinence and decreased frequency of sex were fear of fetal injury (reported by 30% of the women), and somatic symptoms of pregnancy (22%). A number of the pregnant women also abstained from sex to protect their fetuses from STD, as 13% of the women knew that their husbands had had extramarital sex.

Unfortunately, most of the available data on the sexual behavior within Thai couples are from research conducted prior to 1982. The paucity of more-recent findings points to the need for more research. Information in this area will afford us a better understanding of extramarital sex, sexual dysfunctions, heterosexual transmission of HIV and sexually transmitted diseases, and marital satisfaction and discord.

Extramarital Sex

Perhaps extramarital sexual practices in Thailand are best illustrated by the findings from the *Partner Relations Survey* by Werasit Sittitrai and his colleagues (1992). They found that 31% of urban male participants and 12% of rural male participants—17% overall—reported having had sex outside their relationship in the previous 12 months. The data from women were quite different: only 1% of the urban female participants and 0.7% of the rural female participants—0.9% overall—reported sex outside their relationship in the previous 12 months. The remarkable gender difference in extramarital sex in these findings will be more extensively discussed below.

Despite the historical acceptance, male polygamy is no longer legally or socially acceptable in the contemporary Thai society. However, the tradition continues in modern days in a more secretive fashion. Whereas a "virtuous woman" or *kulasatrii* (see traditional female gender role in Section 1, Basic Sexological Premises) must remain faithful to her husband, there were no equivalent rules in history mandating fidelity in the "virtuous man." In fact, upper-class Thai men were historically known to maintain mansions with a co-residence of multiple wives and their children. Among the royalty and courtiers in the past, wives were classified as principal, secondary, and slave (Pyne 1994). Today, the tradition of "minor wives" still remains, but the practice is different from that of the past. Also, because of the expense involved, minor wives are mostly limited to the wealthy men, although Thorbek (1988) has also documented the practice in men of lower socioeconomic strata. [Comment 2003: Barmé (2002, 157-178) has provided a history of Thai polygyny in the 20th century, tracing its variations and cultural response in government and public debates, cartoons, cinema, and pop media, from pre-modern Siam to modern Thai culture. (End of comment by R. T. Francoeur)]

Euphemistically called having a "little home," the practice of keeping a minor wife usually occurs today in secrecy from the "primary wife," and minor wives rarely share the home with the man and his family as in the old days. While almost all married women today object to this practice, and indeed for many it has been grounds for divorce, other women learn to cope with their anger and emotional betrayal. Minor wives are viewed with contempt by the Thai society along the lines of being amoral women or home breakers. They do not achieve social or legal recognition as a spouse. A Thai phrase "drinking water from underneath someone else's elbow" illustrates the humiliation and powerlessness of a minor wife, often used to deter young women from considering a relationship with a married male suitor.

Frustrated with the husband's infidelity, potential or real, some married women have been taught by older women and sex journalists to break out of the conservative sexual norms of a *kulasatrii* by adopting the dual role of "a *kulasatrii* outside the bedroom, and a prostitute inside." Extramarital sex for a married woman is, however, not a viable option. In a seminar with participants from rural villages in northern Thailand, men told Pacharin Dumronggittigule and her colleagues (personal communication 1995) that if a woman had more sexual desire than her husband could satisfy, she should "hit her feet with a hammer," indicating their belief that the use of drastic means was needed to suppress women's sexual desires. In a folk-tale epic, *Khun Chaang, Khun Phaen*, the heroine, Wanthong, was persecuted for being torn between her relationships with the two male protagonists. Although women today are not persecuted, as was Wanthong, her tragic fate reflects the society's clear prohibitive rule against women's emotional and sexual infidelity.

Whereas minor wives are the secret sexual indulgence for wealthy men, sex with commercial sex workers is widely accepted by almost all male adults, regardless of age, socioeconomic class, or marital status. After marriage, Thai men seem to be monogamous with their wives for a period of time, although the duration of this monogamy has not been investigated. A great number, however, resume their use of commercial sex, often in the context of all-male, "husbands' night out" socialization with their peers.

Dumronggittigule and her colleagues (1995) examined the married men's use of commercial sex by conducting focus groups with married villagers in northern Thailand. They found that the cultural processes behind this phenomenon were different from the processes for the Thai bachelors.

Thai men visit commercial sex workers after socializing with male friends, a pattern established since the start of their experience with commercial sex. For married men's gatherings, women are not necessarily precluded from the social gatherings, as the meals are often prepared by women, but excessive alcohol consumption and gambling repel women from further participation. Married men reported that their sexual desires are enhanced because of the alcohol and the sex talk among the men. Married women, on the contrary, reported that after a long day of work outside and inside the home, they were not sexually thrilled by their husbands' drunken manners and alcohol smells, and many refused to have sex. Other couples reportedly avoided this conflict by having an a priori agreement that the husbands could take their sexual desire elsewhere.

Moreover, the villagers reported other common causes of diminished sexual attraction within the couple. Women reported that the strenuous work inside and outside the home caused them to be exhausted, irritable, and uninterested in sex, and their husband's drinking and gambling with male friends did not help. Men, on the other hand, commented on their wife's homely appearance, angry temperament, and sexual unresponsiveness, all of which made them turn to drinking, gambling, and commercial sex as recreation. As this spiral of blame and self-defense continued, conflicts and resentment grew. Following what they had seen in other couples, many women decided that consenting to their husband's use of commercial sex could relieve this dilemma. Thus, the use of commercial sex by married men is often consented to or known by their wives. For both men and women, the husband's extramarital sex is not a cause of marital conflicts, but an attempted solution designed to preserve their marriage.

Married women, therefore, do not simply consent to their husband's use of commercial sex because "Thai people have permissive attitudes toward men's extramarital sex," as is often quoted. In the same study cited above, Dumronggittigule and colleagues (1995) used anonymous questionnaires to collect data from 170 married couples in the villages. They found feelings of frustration, worry, and helplessness among the women who believed their husbands had regular sex with sex workers. Almost all the married women objected to their husband visiting sex workers. Ninety-one percent of these women had asked their husband to refrain from such behavior, but 47% of the women believed their husbands would visit or had visited sex workers. Although they felt vulnerable to HIV infection, these married women still did not think that their husband would respond to their fears. Instead, these women would rather protect themselves from HIV by having protected sex with their husbands; 83% reported they would be willing to have their husbands use condoms with them. The women's interest in self-protection, however, might not lead to an actual prevention; most couples had never used condoms with each other and were unlikely to change upon the women's requests.

Alcohol Use and Sexual Behavior

The use of alcohol is a regular part of Thai culture and tradition despite the prohibition in the Buddhist Fifth Precept. Many male adolescents in northern Thailand begin drinking commercially produced whiskey or village-prepared liquor at the age of 14 or 15. They will often drink alcohol with a few friends and go as a small group to have sex with sex workers (van Landingham et al. 1993). Adolescent girls will often start drinking at the age of 17 or 18. They are more likely to drink when there are parties as part of a celebration. Drinking and sex in combination is a common way for adolescents to be sexual with one another (Nopkesorn, Sweat,

Kaensing, & Teppa 1993). Thai men often report that alcohol makes them "horny," although using condoms is usually more difficult in an intoxicated state. Data confirm that alcohol use does interfere with the use of condoms in the commercial sex settings (Mastro & Limpakarnjanarat 1995).

6. Homoerotic, Homosexual, and Bisexual Behaviors

A. Attitudes Toward Homosexuality in Buddhism and Thai Society

Although homosexual behavior in Thailand is assumed to be quite common, little formal research has been done. Most of the available data pertain to men, and there is a paucity of information regarding women. There has been a general reluctance, as with other Asian cultures, to openly discuss or scientifically study homosexual behaviors. In a large 1990 population-based survey (Sittitrai et al. 1992), extremely low rates of male homosexual behavior were reported; the authors cautioned that, because of societal attitudes, these estimates were probably too low and reflected the research participants' underreporting of homoerotic and homosexual experiences (the prevalence of same-gender sexual behavior will be further reviewed below).

The attitudes toward homosexuality are quite complex: On the one hand, the behavior is clearly stigmatized, and on the other, tolerated. Probably the manner in which it is expressed is a more critical variable for social acceptance. In the culture in which men's sexual desires are exaggerated, it is understandable that men might, from time to time, hypothetically engage in sexual behavior with other men for pragmatic purposes (e.g., when women are not available or when they need money). Women may face stronger negative sanction than men. Again, a double standard regarding general sexuality may be at play here. Homosexual behavior for women is less tolerated, probably because virtuous women express their sexuality only with their husbands.

Overall, most contemporary Thais view heterosexuality as the norm; homosexuality is seen as a deviance or an unnatural act, often resulting from one's bad *karma* or the lack of merit in past lives. To the more superstitious Thais, homosexual acts, which are an aberration from "how nature intends," are punishable by animistic powers. Contemporary Thais still express their disapproval of homosexuality by saying, often blithely, that "lightning will strike" those who engage in sex with a person of the same gender. The educated Thais understand homosexuality in terms of mental problems or illness. Many think homosexuality is caused by problems in upbringing or parental characteristics (e.g., a domineering mother and a passive father), while others also attribute it to the child's oversocialization with the opposite gender, e.g., a boy spending too much time with his aunts, sisters, or female peers, or not having a father around as a male role model. This pathology model of homosexuality most likely originated in the Western psychiatric theories of sexuality which dominated Western medicine and psychology until the 1960s and 1970s. Many Thai physicians and psychologists still subscribe to these antiquated theories and remain impervious to new research findings or the American Psychiatric Association's declassification of homosexuality as a mental illness in 1974.

Buddhism is mostly silent on the topic of homosexuality. Despite some ambivalence toward homosexuality in many Buddhist cultures, Cabezón (1993) notes Buddhism only condemns homosexuality more for being an instance of sexuality rather than its same-gender sex. "The principal question for Buddhism has not been one of heterosexuality versus homosexuality, but one of sexuality versus celibacy" (p. 82).

Cabezón further notes that, as far as the laity are concerned, homosexuality is rarely mentioned as a transgression of the Third Precept in Buddhist texts and oral commentaries.

References to homosexuality have been found in the Buddhist canon and the *Jataka*, the stories of the Buddha's previous lives. Leonard Zwilling has noted that only in the *Vinaya*, the monastic discipline which forms one of the three sections of the Buddhist canon, is there mention of same-gender attraction and effeminacy in men. These instances were, according to Zwilling, "derogated much to the same degree as comparable heterosexual acts" (quoted in Cabezón 1993, 88). As for other sections of the Buddhist canon, John Garret Jones (cited in Cabezón 1993) has concluded that there is an implicit affirmation from the silence regarding homosexuality, and the silence is certainly not because of the lack of material.

Whereas the canon is silent about homosexuality, the *Jataka* literature, in which the previously mentioned tale of Prince Vessantara is embedded, is replete with sentiments about same-gender affection. One example can be found in the eloquent past-life stories of the Buddha and his disciple and attendant, Ananda. In one scenario, the Buddha and Ananda are depicted as two deer who "always went about together . . . ruminating and cuddling together, very happy, head to head, nozzle to nozzle, horn to horn." In another story, a serpent king who falls in love with Ananda "encircled the ascetic with snakes folds, and embraced him, with his great hood upon his head; and there he lay a little, till his affection was satisfied" (Jones 1979, quoted in Cabezón 1993, 89). These examples are but a few of many instances which articulate same-gender affection in the context of friendships between men in the *Jatakas*. Considering the enormous number of warnings about the dangers of heterosexual relationships, Cabezón argues that the absence of warning about same-gender relationship is remarkable. It suggests that the attitude toward homosexuality in the Indian *Jataka* texts is one of acceptance, and occasionally even a eulogy, of these feelings.

Allyn (1991) cites yet another Buddhist story, possibly a folk version, told on Thai radio about a male disciple who had fallen in love with the Buddha. The disciple expresses admiration for the Buddha's beauty. The Buddha responded to these acts of admiration by a gentle reminder of the body's impermanence, a likely response for a female admirer as well. Taken together with the analysis of the canon and the *Jataka* tales, this story illustrates Buddhism's neutral position on the issue of homosexuality. Nevertheless, it should be noted that some negative attitudes can be found in the Buddhist practice today. For example, some Thai people have heard that a man who acknowledges his homosexuality will be denied Buddhist ordination, although such instances may have been very rare or never enforced.

In contrast to the neutral position of Buddhism, anti-homosexual attitudes are quite common among Thai people. Chompootawee and colleagues (1991) found that 75% of both male and female adolescents reported negative attitudes toward homosexuality. In addition to these disapproving attitudes, Thai people who have sex with the same gender also have other important considerations when they make sexual and relationship decisions. Thais are concerned about matters which would cause an individual or family to lose face, and maintaining relationships with their family is of an extreme importance. To reveal one's homosexual orientation to one's parents would, in a sense, violate the Third Precept of Buddhism, and this has caused many Thai gays and lesbians to hide their homosexuality from their parents for fear of causing them sorrow (Allyn 1991). On the other hand, what an individual does in privacy is less of a concern. Thus, a per-

son's homosexual sex, *per se*, may be easier for his or her family than other more visible features, such as long-term same-gender relationships (Jackson 1989) or coming out as an openly gay or lesbian person.

The fact that same-gender sex is less stigmatized than the public disclosure of this behavior deserves some discussion. Same-gender sexual experience does not necessarily carry the assumption of homosexuality or a homosexual identity in Thailand (Sittitrai, Brown, & Virulak 1991). There are no laws prohibiting homosexual behavior (Jackson 1989). On the other hand, the social pressure to be in conformity with the expectations of family and culture is extremely intense. Indeed, these sanctions may have a stronger effect than religious or legal sanctions. A public statement of homosexual identity would violate two important values of Thai culture: harmony—not to confront disagreements or conflicts—and the great value placed upon preservation of family units and preserving lineage through marriage and procreation. Allyn (1991) also contends that the anti-homosexual attitudes in the Thai society are primarily the discrimination against the feminine *kathoe*y (see Section 7, Gender Diversity and Transgender Issues) who, according to stereotype, display overt and loud gender-atypical social manners.

B. Social Constructions of Sexual Orientation in Thailand

The labels homosexual, bisexual, and heterosexual are Western constructs and do not exactly fit the traditional social constructions in Thailand. Assuming a gay or bisexual identity is also a new, if not foreign, concept; for example, there is no translation or the equivalent Thai word for "gay," and as of 1996, the construct "sexual orientation" had not been translated even for academic use. In the past few decades, Thai people have increasingly used the English words "gay" and "lesbian" in both the mainstream and academic contexts. The terms "homo" and "homosexual" are also used. Conventionally, the most widely used term for "homosexual" was an extremely obscure euphemism *len phuean*, roughly translated as "playing with friends." Another popular usage employs a literary analogy, *mai paa deow kan*, meaning "trees in the same forest" (Allyn 1991). The now-rare term *lakka-phayt*, roughly translated to "sexual perversion" in English, was sometimes used to describe homosexuality within the medical context, therefore illustrating the past influence of Western psychiatry.

The technical terms "heterosexual" and "homosexual" were transliterated into Thai 20 or 30 years ago for academic purposes. The term for "heterosexual" was *rug taang phayt*, meaning "loving the different gender" and the term for "homosexual" was *rug ruam phayt*, meaning "loving the same gender." This might indicate that the Thai construct of loving another is inseparable from eroticizing another. By the same logic, bisexuality was subsequently translated to *rug song phayt*, meaning "loving two genders." However, the directly borrowed term "bisexual" and its shortened derivative, *bai*, are more popular and have been part of the Thai sexual vocabulary of late.

More recently, with influences from Western cultures, the concepts of homosexuality and sexual orientation have infiltrated the Thai thinking. These concepts quickly became popularized and transformed to fit the indigenous constructs (see also Section 7, Gender Diversity and Transgender Issues, for the discussion of the indigenous concept of *kathoe*y). In the following discussions, the Thai social constructions of homosexuality in men and women will be examined separately to maximize clarity. We realize that this approach has its own shortcomings, as male and female

homosexualities in most cultures are, conceptually and politically speaking, not discrete entities. However, much more has been written about male homosexuality in Thailand, and a discourse to conceptually bridge the parallel phenomena in men and women has yet to be made. There is still little evidence that the discussion about this construct in one gender can be generalized to the other.

C. Homosexuality in Men

A small number of studies have attempted to find the prevalence of homosexual behavior in men. In a population-based study (Sittitrai et al. 1992), only 3.1% of the men reported having had sex with men and women, and 0.2% reported it with men exclusively. The authors of the study speculated that these statistics were an underestimation because of underreporting. Cohorts of military conscripts, comprised of men mostly age 21 from lower socioeconomic populations, have also shown varying rates of male-male sexual experience. Among the 1990 conscripts from northern Thailand (Nopkesorn et al. 1991), 26% reported having had sex with a man, 15% reported past anal intercourse with a man, and 12% reported sexual arousal in response to male nudes. In the 1992 conscripts from northern Thailand (Nopkesorn, Sweat et al. 1993), 14% reported having had at least one instance of insertive anal sex with a *kathoe*y in their lifetimes, 3% with non-*kathoe*y men, and 3% reported having had receptive anal sex. In another study of 2,047 military conscripts from northern Thailand (Beyrer, et al. 1995), 134 men (7%) reported having had sex with men; most of these men were also more likely to have higher numbers of female sexual partners than other men who had sex with women exclusively.

In Thai society today, men who have sex with men are either *gay king* or *gay queen*: A *gay king* is a man who plays the insertive role in sex, whereas a *gay queen* takes a passive and receptive role in sex (Allyn 1991). Versatility in sexual behavior is obviously not a traditional construct, and the gender dichotomy pervades the Thai conceptualization of sex between men. Gender dimorphism also necessitates that the society views homosexuality in reference to the fundamental genders of male and female. Also, cross-gendered manners and behavior are seen as indicating the essence of homosexuality in a person (other terms for male homosexuality related to cross-gendered behaviors will be discussed in Section 7, Gender Diversity and Transgender Issues). *Gay queens* are assumed to have feminine characteristics, and are therefore, "true homosexuals." On the other hand, *gay kings*, stereotyped as male-acting and male-appearing, are seen as less likely to be "permanently" homosexual. Thai people think that *gay kings* are simply heterosexual men going through a phase of sexual experimentation with other men. *Gay kings* are also variously referred to as "100% male" (*phuu-chaai roi poe-sen*) and "a complete man" (*phuu-chaai tem tua*) (Jackson 1989), which reflects the belief that the insertive homosexual sex act does not jeopardize one's masculinity. The idea that *gay kings* are confused or adventurous heterosexuals can be seen in many Thai movies and fiction about gay relationships with a tragic ending, when the *gay king* hero leaves a devastated *gay queen* to marry a woman. Moreover, the Thai myth of men's boundless sexuality states that "a real man" (i.e., real heterosexual) can derive sexual pleasure from anyone, regardless of gender. The playful term for bisexual men, *suea bai* (meaning "bisexual tiger") connotes this admiration of bisexual men's sexual vigor (Allyn 1991). Bisexual behavior, therefore, is seen as an attribute of *gay kings*, bisexual men, and "indiscriminate" heterosexual men alike.

Actual data on sexual behavior confirm the fluidity of sex between men in Thailand as implied by the classification

above. For example, military conscripts who reported same-gender sexual behavior were more likely to be married, have girlfriends, and visit female sex partners more often than their counterparts who have had sex with women exclusively (Beyrer et al. 1995). Northeastern men recruited through the social network of men who had sex with men demonstrated equally complicated behaviors. Their reported sex acts covered a whole gamut of insertive and receptive intercourse, both oral and anal; their sexual partners included both genders of commercial sex workers, casual partners, and lovers (Sittitrai, Brown, & Sakondhavat 1993).

Primary affectional and sexual relationships between men are quite common, although these relationships are not akin to the Western concept of the gay couple. These relationships may be of very short duration, without much long-term commitment, and without much social or familial recognition. There are distinct problems maintaining homosexual relationships. First, because long-term relationships by nature end up being more public, they invite more public scrutiny and negative sanction. Second, the same-sex relationships would interfere with what the heterosexist norm expects of a man: to get married to a woman and have children. Finally, there are no models for same-sex relationships within Thai culture. The only role models would come from *farang* (Westerners), but their codes of conduct would not necessarily work in the Thai culture. This lack of role models and solutions for the Thai male couples has caused much jealousy and conflicts around infidelity, creating many heartaches and failed relationships (Jackson 1989). For many other couples, however, male romantic and sexual relationships adhere closely to the heterosexual model of sex roles: in fact, a *gay king* almost always pairs with a *gay queen*, and Thais find it difficult to comprehend if two *gay kings* or two *gay queens* would settle down together. Following the traditional Thai heterosexual relationship which prescribes monogamy in the women and sexual freedom in the men, *gay kings* also have a tendency to seek out sexual pleasures outside their relationship with a *gay queen*.

In reaching "gay men," *gay kings*, *gay queens*, and *kathoey* for HIV prevention, there is an effort in Thai society to organize and empower these individuals. This attempt follows HIV-prevention strategies from Western cultures. Local activists and international agencies in Thailand are fostering an adoption of the gay-identity concept to identify, reach, and empower men who have sex with men, in an effort to prevent the spread of HIV among them and their partners, both male and female. There remains an ethical question regarding the cultural imperialism of the West, which is imposing Western-constructed identities on a culture which has maintained different constructs of sexual orientation and sexual behavior. Examination of Thai and other cultures which have diverse constructs of sexual orientation has challenged the universality of categories of sexual orientation adopted by the West. This has forced HIV-prevention campaigns in the West to employ strategies which take into account the fact that not all segments of society identify themselves as gay, straight, or bisexual. One example of such attempts is to identify the population of interest based on their sexual behavior (e.g., "men who have sex with men" or "men who have sex with both men and women"), instead of selecting them by their "risk group" or "gay" or "bisexual" self-identity. Hopefully, the cultural exchange will lead to greater understanding of homosexuality and the promotion of sexual health among those individuals who engage in same-gender sex in any society (Coleman 1996).

Regarding the gay identity in Thailand, there has been a rapid development since the mid-1980s of a gay identity with a Thai twist. Meanwhile, gay enterprising and political activ-

ities began to thrive in Bangkok and other big cities. Until the late 1980s, the only regular media coverage on homosexuality was an advice column in the widely popular tabloid *Plaek* ("Strange") titled *Chiiwit Sao Chao Gay* ("The Sad Lives of Gays") in which Go Paaknaam, a straight-identified columnist, published letters about sexual and relationship problems from men who have sex with men (Allyn 1991). In contrast to the previous coverage which tended to be rare and eccentric, in recent years Thailand has seen a proliferation of magazines in the format of erotica for gay men. In addition to erotica, these publications also provide an avenue for men to meet through personal advertisements, as well as the new forum for exchanging social and political views. More social networks have been formed, often composed of previously isolated gay men, many of whom do not have access to or participate in the thriving gay bar scenes in big cities. A more solidified yet multifaceted gay identity has slowly evolved as Thai men participate in the discourse on their sexuality through these publications. In the meantime, Thai mainstream media, especially newspaper and magazines, have increased accurate representations of gay life, as well as progressive treatises on homosexuality, although sensationalistic coverage is still common.

In addition, entertainment businesses for gay men have flourished in big cities. A variety of gay restaurants and pubs have been opened, with and without *deg off* ("off-boys," or male sex workers), providing places for leisure, sex, and socialization. Bangkok sports one of the world's most famous gay saunas (bathhouses). Men in these surroundings are motivated not only by a bit of the Thai *sanuk* (fun, pleasure, and enjoyment), but also the camaraderie and the search for a relationship partner (Allyn 1991). These new developments represent a remarkable difference in how men who have sex with men meet one another today; in the past, these encounters were non-public, secretive and often involved commercial sex workers. Instead, the thriving of Bangkok gay scenes allows men who have sex with men to have more continuity between their sexual activities, their social life, and their sexual identity. As Allyn notes: "Love stories were being made here, most of them bittersweet ones. Gay Thai men have perhaps added the key ingredient to the development of a gay identity: love" (p. 157). Allyn further notes that, "Over the past two decades, superficial aspects of Western, particularly American gay culture, have been imported to a certain degree but, as the kingdom traditionally has done, by adaptation, not adoption" (p. 158).

One example of such an adaptation is the recent concept of *kulagay* invented by the Thai gay media, although it is still not widely in use. As in *kulasatrii*, *kula* being "virtuous" or "decent," a *kulagay* is a virtuous Thai gay man who adheres to traditional Thai values, contributes to society, and rejects the Thai stereotypes of the *kathoey* and promiscuity (Allyn 1991). The invention of the *kulagay* identity reflects the movement's attempt to assimilate homosexuality into the social fabric of Thai society by way of deference to the traditional values.

In 1981, a "gay rights" organization called Chaai Chawb Chaai (men liking men) was established, but was disbanded shortly thereafter because there was no evidence of discrimination (Allyn 1991). In 1989, two organizations were formed in response to the HIV epidemic: Fraternity for AIDS Cessation in Thailand (FACT), and Gay Entrepreneurs Association of Thailand (GEAT). GEAT is made up of Bangkok bar owners and is concerned with issues of business. After great success from their educational theater group, the White Line, FACT also developed a subsidiary group called FACT Friends, which began weekly support groups for the many Thai gay men who were tired of the commercial gay scene.

By 1991, FACT was awarded international grants and transformed from a grassroots volunteer organization to a foundation with a formal structure (Allyn 1991).

Despite the many developments of a gay identity in Thailand, the average Thai gay man lives his gay life separately from the other parts of his life. Allyn (1991) speculates that this way of life is sufficient for many, as many Thai gay men have expressed satisfaction. Allyn further suggests that Thai people are trained since childhood to accept their lot in life. Similar to the way the perceived transience of gender helps many Thai women to accept their role (see Section 1, Basic Sexological Premises), Thai gay men perhaps think that their sexual orientation is only one of the many sufferings a being faces in different incarnations. Therefore, a private sex life and the constraint of being a "model Thai" may not be fraught with as much psychological pain as his Western counterparts might experience. To date, there is no evidence that gay men in Thailand are more psychologically distressed than heterosexual men.

D. Homosexuality in Women

There is an extreme paucity of information on women who have sex with women. Adopted several decades ago, the term "lesbian" is now recognized by most Thai people as describing love or sex between women, along with its derivatives *ael bii* (Thai acronym for "L.B.") and *bian*, which could be used pejoratively or euphemistically. Also, a rather vulgar slang *tii ching*, or "playing [small, paired] cymbals," compares two vaginas in lesbian sex with a pair of opposing, identical concave musical instruments. In the past decade, other terms for lesbianism have come into vogue. Paralleling the *gay king-gay queen* dichotomy in male homosexuality, lesbians are categorized into *thom* (derived from "tomboy") and *dii* (short for "lady"), mostly based on their social manners and appearances. The *thom* women, with the masculine appearance, are assumed to have a dominant role in the relationship. Women who are *dii*, on the other hand, are feminine looking and passive in gender role. Because of the extreme popularity of these terms, most Thais now refer to lesbianism (female homosexuality) as "women being *thom-dii*."

Thai people are quite confused by the feminine *dii* women because they are indistinguishable from the typical Thai women in their social manners. Most Thais speculate that *dii* women will eventually grow out of their phase of experimentation or confusion, and commit to a relationship with a man (much as they think of the *gay king* men). On the other hand, the masculine *thom* women are seen by Thais as women who want to be a man, much as feminine homosexual men are assumed to want to be a woman. Androgynous behavior in women, although not traditionally praised, has been relatively tolerated in adolescents. Popular fiction has portrayed a number of female protagonists who have "tomboy" demeanor: bold, assertive, and boyishly naughty, while nonchalant and unaware of their feminine attractiveness hidden inside. Nevertheless, these characters are unmistakably heterosexual, as there is never any depiction of homoeroticism or lesbian character in the lives of these tomboys. As a rule, these young heroines always outgrow their tomboy phase as they are transformed into a "fully grown woman" by their first love with a man whom they marry at the end of the story.

Prior to the late 1980s, Thai people in general seemed to show little awareness of the existence of love and sex between women. In the 1980s, a tabloid ran an advice column for lesbians, *Go Sa Yaang*, by a straight man, Go Paaknaam, following the popularity of his column for gay men (Allyn 1991). Yet, lesbian women never had erotic publications or enterprises as these businesses began to flourish for gay

men. However, sex and love between women started to come into public attention in the late 1980s and early 1990s. As more and more young women have shown up in public looking like pairs of a *thom* and a *dii*, displaying public intimacy slightly beyond the usual confines of peer manners, the media have called it an epidemic of *thom-dii-ism*. Much anxiety and concerns have been expressed by parents and the media regarding this increased visibility of lesbianism. Many conservatives search for a cause of lesbianism in the modern or Western values, claiming that women today are taught to strive for power and autonomy. For these conservatives, women are attracted to other women because they have become more like men. Others have blamed androgynous women in the Thai pop culture for modeling gender-atypical behavior and, in turn, inducing lesbian interests among the adoring young fans.

Sensationalistic media and conservatives aside, women who love (and have sex with) women have recently emerged in Thai society with an agenda to forge ahead with a Thai lesbian identity in their own right. Anjaree is a new organization for Thai lesbian women which came into public attention in 1992. The name of the organization comes from merging two words, *anya* and *jaree*, to denote "a different path" (Otaganonta 1995). Aside from publishing a newsletter, *Anjaree Sarn*, the organization also played a key role in setting up the Asian Lesbian Network, which hosted its first meeting in 1990 in Bangkok. This initiative earned Anjaree the Filipa de Sausa Award, presented by the International Gay and Lesbian Rights Commission based in New York, which is given to individuals and groups that take initiatives to promote the rights of sexual minorities. One of the group's founders states in a *Bangkok Post* interview:

I don't think people need to identify themselves as heterosexuals or homosexuals. American society places much importance on defining oneself as this or that, but in Thailand, sexual orientation has never been a major part of self identity. But we are aware of the obstacles that Thai lesbians face. That's why we have to assert ourselves in this way. Still there is no need for us to identify ourselves only as lesbians. (Otaganonta 1995, 36)

As evident in the discussions about homosexuality in men and women above, Western constructions of homosexuality have had inevitable influences in the ways contemporary Thais understand sex and love between people of the same gender. The Thai vocabulary for homosexuality, lesbian, gay, *gay king*, *gay queen*, *thom*, *dii*, all had their origin in the English language. Alternative to the simplistic notion that Thai people are emulating Western sexuality, we argue that Thai people might have found that their indigenous constructions could no longer explain or fit their observations of sexual phenomena. In an attempt to find satisfactory explanations, Thai people have found plausible frameworks in the Western paradigm of sexual orientation and homosexuality which complements their indigenous construction. In the following section, we turn to a review of the *kathoei*, which was possibly the only indigenous social construction of non-heterosexuality in Thailand before the arrival of the Western paradigm.

7. Gender Diversity and Transgender Issues

As noted in the previous section, traditional Thai sexuality did not reflect clear distinctions between homosexuality, bisexuality, and heterosexuality as explicitly drawn by Western cultures. Rather, the most salient of all sexual distinctions is the bipolarity of gender: A person is either a man or a

woman. Based on these two fundamental male and female genders, the *kathoey* exists as another gender identity in the Thai society. Roughly equivalent to the English term “hermaphrodite,” *kathoey* (pronounced “ka-toey”) has been defined as a “person or animal of which the sex is indeterminate” in the Thai-English dictionary (McFarland 1982). Despite such a medical connotation, *kathoey* has been used, at least in the last several decades, to describe a biologically male person who has sex with men, therefore covering a gamut of male homosexualities.

The use of the term *kathoey* to describe male homosexualities, however, has slowly given way to the more contemporary *gay* and its derivatives. Today, *kathoey* mostly refers to men who have feminine social behaviors, without much specific reference to their biological gender or sexual behavior. Being associated with feminine characters and other stereotypes (see below), the term is considered derogatory by Thai gay men today, many of whom adamantly distinguish themselves from *kathoey*. Other derogatory slang words, applied to both gay men and *kathoey*, are *tut* and *tutsii* (the latter from the title of an American movie, *Tootsie*, starring cross-dressed Dustin Hoffman), which, because their pronunciations are close to the derogatory Thai word for “ass,” suggest anal intercourse (Jackson 1997; Nanda 2000).

As implied in the usage today, a *kathoey* is a man who sees himself more as a woman and often dresses, to varying degrees, as a woman, and is likely to have sex with men. Some take estrogens and progesterone to facilitate breast development and other body transformations. A few will undergo surgical sex-reassignment surgery. This surgery is well known and available in Thailand, although it is extremely expensive by Thai standards. In Western conceptualization, the *kathoey* may be considered either effeminate homosexual men, transvestites, or pre- or post-operative transsexuals, none of which is readily applicable to the traditional construction of sexuality in Thailand. Thai people mainly see the *kathoey* as either the “third gender,” or a combination of the male and female genders. Alternatively, they are also seen as a female gender, but of the “other” variety, as reflected in a synonym *ying pra-phayt song*, meaning “women of the second kind.”

These understandings of the *kathoey* suggest that Thai people have traditionally tried to make sense of this phenomenon in fundamental male-female terms. As a result, the Thai interpretations of the *kathoey* have been within the confines of the gender bipolarity. Nevertheless, the *kathoey* have been a well-known category in the sexual and gender typology of the Thai culture. Children and adults can often identify at least one *kathoey* in every village or school. Despite their subtle “outcast” status, the village *kathoey* are often given duties in local festivities and ceremonies, mostly in female-typical roles such as floral arrangements or food preparation. The *kathoey* seem to have adopted the “nurturer” role prescribed to Theravada women, and ideas of female pollution (e.g., the touch taboo and fear of menstruation) are extended to the *kathoey* as well. Social discrimination varies in degrees, ranging from hostile animosity to stereotypic assumptions. Some of the assumptions are based on the idea that the *kathoey* are unnatural, a result of poor *karma* from past lives; other assumptions are typical of generalizations about women as a whole.

To illustrate the stereotype, the Thai cinema and contemporary literature usually dramatize the *kathoey* as highly histrionic in gestures, emotionally unstable, subject to men’s abandonment, and thus leading lives of bitterness, loneliness, suicides, or promiscuity. Although there are plenty of *kathoey* who hold other professions, stereotype predicates that many *kathoey* become street sex workers or small-time criminals, and others become beauticians, fashion designers,

hairdressers, florists, artists, or entertainers (Allyn 1991). A few comedians and media personalities have been publicly known for their *kathoey* sensibilities and camp humor, while other *kathoey* celebrities have caused public sensations by their flamboyance or eccentricities. Many *kathoey* have healthy long-term relationships with men, although Jackson (1989) has noted the stereotype of *kathoey* providing financial support to young men with whom they are in a romantic relationship. This “kept boy” tradition is an interesting reverse of the minor wife tradition in straight men. Stereotype notwithstanding, the image of *kathoey* as a resourceful member of the community and a benefactor of young men is remarkably more positive than the Western images that most cross-gendered individuals are street transsexuals who live marginalized lives in the underworld of drugs and prostitution. In Thailand, *kathoey* find each other or married women for social support and, despite a degree of discrimination from the new gay-identified men, they are well accepted into the contemporary gay scenes.

Because for most Thais, the concepts of gay and *kathoey* are not clearly distinguished from one another, the stereotypic features of the *kathoey* are thought to be also attributes of gay men, particular *gay queens*. Some Thai men who have sex with men alternately refer to themselves as gay for political reasons, and *kathoey* for self-deprecating humor. These images of the *kathoey* (and to a lesser degree, “gay men”) in the Thai society bare striking similarities to the stereotyped lives of gay men and drag queens in Western societies before the gay liberation movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Interestingly, the American play, *The Boys in the Band* by Mart Crowley, was translated to the Thai context in the late 1980s and became an immensely popular show. The appreciation that the mainstream audience had for the images of *kathoey* and gay men—as individuals struggling with societal pressure and self-hatred—sums up the overall social climate toward homosexuality today: characterized by sympathy, fascination, and curiosity, yet riddled with ambivalence and stereotyping.

Another cross-gendered phenomenon is found primarily in women in the cults of the ancestral spirits (*phii*) in northern Thailand (see also Manderson 1992). Members of the *phii* cults believe that ancestral guardian spirits are passed on matrilineally to young women in order to maintain health, harmony, and well-being in the family. Certain women, by becoming “possessed” by the *phii*, serve as mediums for the spirits, and they are called *maa khii*. In their annual ritual, these women, and sometimes children, are possessed by their ancestral spirits and perform dances, which include displays of wild and rude behaviors (e.g., drinking, smoking Thai cigars, and shouting expletives and insults), as well as stereotypically masculine behaviors (e.g., wearing men’s clothes and flirting and dancing with young women). However, because of their revered role as *maa khii*, many of these women are held in high esteem. Outside these rituals and performances, these women, most of whom are married to a man and hold respectable roles (e.g., healers and midwives) in their village community, return to their everyday behavior typical of the female gender. Although most of these women do not remember the specific events during the trance, they are well aware of the male characters they take on during the dances. In an interesting twist of role, these women hold positions of power, in contrast to the general patriarchal Thai society and the male domination in Buddhism.

While most *maa khii* are women, a noticeable minority are male, and many are also *kathoey*. We have observed that the *maa khii* who are *kathoey* also enjoy a more-revered place in the community, overcoming some of the ordinary stigma they would otherwise experience. During the spiri-

tual dance (*fawn phii*), the mediums who are *kathoeys*, like their female counterparts, exhibit male-stereotypical behavior remarkably different from their own manners during ordinary circumstances.

8. Significant Unconventional Sexual Behaviors

A. Coercive Sex

As discussed earlier in Section 1B, Basic Sexological Premises, Romance, Love, and Marriage, the Third Precept of Buddhism professes to refrain from sexual misconduct, mostly understood to refer to adultery, rape, sexual abuse of children, and careless sexual activities that result in the harm to others. Rape is a criminal offense but the law is rarely enforced. However, rape crime reports are abundant in mainstream and tabloid journalism, often written in a sensational and graphic style which seems designed to titillate the reader. No data exist regarding the extent of the problem. In a study of northern Thai men conscripted to the army in 1990 (Nopkesorn et al. 1991), 5% of the 21-year-old men reported having forced or coerced a woman for sex. The incidence of incest is not known. These matters are rarely discussed or reported.

Young men in Ford and Kittisuksathit's focus groups (1994) made references to the use of violence in order to force women to acquiesce to intercourse. They rationalized that coercion occurred when their sexual desire was provoked by women beyond self-control, and it was mostly directed to women in casual encounters not their *fans*. Numerous folk music and literature provide a cultural script for courtship and sexual persuasion, as apparent in this study. Men see that intercourse involves prior steps of cunning moves, social pressuring, and physical advances, whereas women see intercourse in terms of "submission" or "surrender." Aside from the cultural script, men perhaps generalize from their own experiences of erotic stimulation and ejaculation to the larger patterns of male sexuality. They, therefore, perceive that sexual arousal in men, once initiated, takes its own course and is not subject to control, as characterized by the term *naa meued*, or a state of "black-out" from lust.

Social support for women who have been raped or victimized by incest is not widely available. Consistent with the men's rationalization that they are provoked beyond control, a woman is sometimes viewed as provoking rape because of her appearance (e.g., wearing a provocative dress) or her social behavior (e.g., drinking or frequenting potentially unsafe places). Consequently, Thai parents teach their girls not to dress improperly, and not to go alone to unfamiliar places in order to avoid being raped, as if rape is a price one pays for violating the code of *kulasatrii*. Others, following the cultural script of courtship and sex, see rape as an obscure area, where men's coercion and women's surrendering cannot be clearly differentiated. Women who have been raped or experienced incest in Thailand are socially stigmatized based on these attitudes, in addition to the perception that the woman is flawed because she has been "violated." Understandably, women or their families rarely report these incidents.

B. Prostitution—Commercial Sex

Although the topic of commercial sex appears under the general section of unconventional behaviors, it should be noted that this phenomenon is not considered unconventional in Thailand. However, the topic deserves a focus separate from the general patterns of sexuality as already covered in the sections on adolescent and adult sexual behaviors (Sections 5A and 5B, Interpersonal Heterosexual Behaviors, Adolescent Sexual Behavior and Adult Sexual Behavior). In our discussion of this topic, we use the more value-neutral

terms, such as "sex worker" and "commercial sex," while reserving the terms "prostitute" and "prostitution" for the contexts which require expression of sociocultural values.

History and Current Situations of Commercial Sex in Thailand

Among Thai people, there is a general attitude that prostitution has always been, and will always be, a part of the social fabric of Thailand. This attitude is primarily rationalized by the prevailing myth that men have a greater sexual desire than women. The endorsement of prostitution does not come from men only; a majority of Thai women, especially of the upper and middle classes, readily agree with this logic. In college-level sexuality education courses, female students openly say that prostitution exists to protect "good women" from being raped. Married women from northern Thai rural villages talk in focus groups about their preference for the husbands to seek out sex workers (given a condom is used) rather than taking on a minor wife. Reflecting the general societal attitudes, the married women believe that prostitution is a practical solution for married men whose greater sexual demand cannot be met by their wives (Dumronggittigule et al. 1995).

Thailand is well known throughout the world for its highly organized and diverse commercial sex businesses. Many tourists visit Thailand for this special interest, although many others are obviously drawn by the culture and nature of Thailand, as well as the charming hospitality of Thai people. Tourism caters to men seeking sex in Thailand, and this aspect, which most Thais are not proud of, has been openly acknowledged and advertised. Through the assistance of tour guides or hotel services, commercial sex is available to any male tourist as it is for Thai men. Even outside of Thailand, a large number of Thai sex workers have been working in European countries and Japan since the 1980s; an estimate of 70,000 Thai women are working in commercial sex in Japan alone (Hornblower 1993).

Since the abolition of slavery in 1905, brothels have proliferated steadily and eventually became commonplace throughout the country. The sex industry proliferated during the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s. As military bases of the United States of America were built up in Thailand, many women were induced into the entertainment and sex businesses for American servicemen. When the war ended in 1976, tourism began to grow and has become the largest source of foreign income. Meanwhile, commercial sex became an inevitable part of the tourist attraction (Limanonda 1993).

Prostitution became technically illegal in 1960 from the United Nations' pressure (Brinkmann 1992). In 1966, the Entertainment Places Act led to a plethora of new businesses which served as fronts for commercial sex, such as erotic massage parlors, bars, nightclubs, coffee shops, and barber shops (Manderson 1992). Ironically, although prostitution is illegal, these sex businesses often have government or police officials among their owners. In other cases, these officials are paid by the establishment owners to avoid enforcing the law (Brinkmann 1992). Subsequent attempts from the Thai government to eradicate prostitution have occurred over the years, most notably in 1981 and 1982, but all have been quickly abandoned (Rojanapithayakorn & Hanenberg 1996). Instead, the Thai government has focused on controlling sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) among sex workers using the police authorities and the structure of public-health services (see below).

The number of commercial sex workers in Thailand was estimated to be around 500,000 to 700,000 in 1980 (Thepanom Muangman, Public Health Faculty, Mahidol University;

cited in Keyes 1984). The clientele of these sex workers have been estimated to be about 80% Thai (data cited in Manderson 1992). Most sex workers in rural and urban areas work in establishments such as brothels, restaurants, bars, or erotic massage parlors, all of which are under the management of men. "Direct" sex workers, or those who have sex with their clients on the premises, such as in brothels or erotic cafes, usually charge lower fees and, therefore, are popular among working-class and younger men. "Indirect" sex workers work under the premise of selling other services, such as massage or dancing, with the option to have sex with clients who offer to *off* them (or take them out) for an additional sum or fee. The fee for "direct" sex workers varies from 50 baht (US\$2.00) to 500 baht (US\$20.00), while that of "indirect" sex workers varies from 500 baht (US\$20.00) to several thousands of baht (Weniger et al. 1991).

The demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of female sex workers have been reported in a study of 800 female sex workers from two provinces, one in the north and another in the south (van Griensven, Limanonda, et al. 1995). Only 1% of the women reported that they were younger than 16 years of age, and 11% reported starting working in commercial sex before the age of 16. The national origin was Thai for 85% of the women, with 8% Burmese and 1% Chinese, and 6% from a northern hill tribe. Most of the women, 80%, were from rural areas, while 89% had moved directly from their village of origin to an urban area primarily to work as sex workers. Most had low levels of education: 87% completed less than seven grades of school and 25% could not read or write.

[The Complexity of Thai Commercial Sex

RYAN BISHOP and LILLIAN S. ROBINSON

[Comment 2003: Commercial sex in Thailand provides a complex set of complementary and conflicting intra- and international forces, systems, and trajectories, constituting what might be called a political economy of desire in the second half of the 20th century and beyond, but relying upon a much longer institutional, intellectual, and representational tradition.

[For commercial sex within the kingdom catering to Thai nationals, there is an equally complex set of practices in play, including regional and racial typologies and hierarchies. The indigenous sex industry is clearly much larger than the international sex industry in terms of bodies serving and serviced, although not in terms of revenue generated or circulated.

[Some commentators, including Truong (1990), Hill (1993), and Brock and Thistlethwaite (1996) maintain that Buddhism plays a large role in perpetuating male dominance in Thai culture, thus making it easier for a sex industry to develop and subjugate women. But virtually all of the world's major religions, especially the three Jerusalemic monotheistic ones, include patriarchal power structures that do not necessarily lead to the establishment of prostitution as a major industry, and few other Buddhist societies have developed this industry to the extent that Thailand has. Further, despite allegations to the contrary, Theravada Buddhism as practiced and institutionalized in Thailand explicitly prohibits the practice of prostitution.

[We argue that international sex tourism in Thailand is a complex industry that brings together Cold War geopolitical strategies, international banks, alienated, if comparatively privileged workers from around the globe, and sex workers in girlie bars to constitute the linchpin of a \$5-billion-a-year industry. The discussion that follows, drawn from our fieldwork in Thailand, concentrates solely on the emergence of international sex tourism to Thailand, which has become a synecdoche for prostitution itself in interna-

tional consciousness (Bishop & Robinson 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2002a, 2002b).

[Sex tourism to Thailand arose in a context informed by the availability in the First World of paid and in some cases lengthy holiday time and, because of the promotion of mass tourism, the growing affordability of foreign travel for those with a modest amount of discretionary income. Unlike sex tourism sites in Africa and the Caribbean, where sun, sand, and, in the former case, safaris preceded sex in the chronology of seductive sibilants, in Thailand the sex preceded the tourism. Building upon the vast sex industry serving a local clientele, there emerged a parallel set of institutions tailored to the needs and desires of U.S. and other foreign servicemen present during the Vietnam War period. These included men stationed at the enormous American airbases in Thailand itself, as well as the thousands who were rotated in each week from the combat zone for R&R, rest and recreation. Providing for the needs of troops in the country and those on leave from the front naturally entailed offering accommodations, food and drink, souvenirs of all sorts, and nonsexual entertainment facilities along with sex, all of which assumed significant weight within the Thai economy.

[The establishment in 1967 of U.S. government contracts with Thailand, along with several other sites, to provide R&R for the leisure time of foreign troops clearly brings together key notions of labor, masculinity, and sexuality. There is, after all, no job traditionally reserved to men that is more structured around the body, in its existential dimension, than the military, nor any in whose performance notions of masculinity and male sexuality are more openly deployed to manipulate the men doing the job. From the commonplace that army service will "make a man" of the boy joining up, through training by means of gendered and sexualized insults to the structures of command and compliance, the military relies on a definition of the person-generated male. For this reason, when the combat soldier's perquisites on the job include opportunities for sexual release in the form of camp followers, military brothels, sanctioned rape, or leaves spent in tolerated red-light districts, that release is understood as an integral part of his functioning on the job.

[In Thailand during the Indochina (Vietnam) War, a new sexual institution, the go-go or dance bar, sprang up to supplement traditional bordellos, massage parlors, sexual exhibitions, and "pickup" bars. These dance bars, which have become permanent fixtures in the commercial sex zones of Bangkok and the beach resorts, were modeled, superficially at least, on similar establishments in North America—featuring the same strobe lights, 30-year-old rock music, dancers on display, and promise of sexual encounters. The chief difference is that, instead of one or two dancers on platforms suspended overhead, the Thai bars feature dozens of dancers on a stage, performing with the crotch at eye level, and virtually no female customers. So, instead of the sexual opportunities being consensual arrangements between customers, it is the dancers who also offer that form of entertainment. The Sexual Revolution enacted in late-1960s America is thus parodied—or exposed—in its Bangkok offshoots.

[Typically, there are so many entertainers working on any given night, that each can dance for only a couple of cuts on the tape before being cycled offstage. The message is about sexual abundance. It is while onstage, wearing a button with her identifying number, that a performer is likeliest to catch the eye of a potential customer, who can order her from the waitress along with his beer. When this happens, she steps down and joins him, and he orders a "lady drink" (non-alcoholic) for her. They will fool around for a while, joking and touching, before coming to an agreement to have sex in a room onsite or at a hotel. If such an agreement is reached, the

man pays the bar a fine for taking away a dancer, the amount he pays her directly being understood as a tip. If their relationship is limited to a drink or two, she will rejoin the dancers waiting to go back on stage. The dancer gets some credit for having drinks bought for her, and is expected to go out with customers a minimum of twice a week.

[What happens sexually in these encounters tends to be fairly vanilla or mainstream vaginal and oral sex, with the exotic making its appearance in the erotic chiefly through the customers' sense of abundance and availability, as well as the comparatively low cost of sexual services. What Thai sex workers have to offer the foreign customer is a sense of readiness—indeed, eagerness—to serve sexually, assuring acceptance without the necessity of engaging anything in the transaction but cash, and without the possibility of rejection.

[As our use of the present tense suggests, the girlie bars survived the war that brought them into being. This is because, like the World War II military aircraft factories, they too were converted to civilian use. In 1971, while the Vietnam War continued to rage, Robert McNamara, President of the World Bank and, by no means incidentally, U.S. Secretary of Defense when the R&R contracts were signed, led a World Bank mission to Thailand. When highly placed officials in the Kingdom's governmental and financial classes expressed concern about what would happen to their country's economy once the foreign troops were gone, McNamara assigned a team of World Bank development experts to the problem, and their report, issued in 1975 as the last Americans left Vietnam, recommended that Thailand's path to economic development be through the establishment of a mass-tourism industry.

[That the recommended mass tourism would necessarily build on the infrastructure set up to entertain the troops—an infrastructure itself dependent on commercial sex—went without saying. Although the industry has grown enormously, with tourism replacing rice-export as the country's largest source of foreign exchange by the mid-1980s, the continuity is still apparent, as military R&R contracts were replaced by corporate ones covering oil-industry workers in all-male Middle Eastern environments, and corporate-incentive travel complemented appeals to individual men traveling on their own seeking sexual fulfillment through the commercial transaction. The customers' relation to the larger structures that institutionalize their sexuality parallels Thai peasant girls' need for an adequate livelihood and to create the political economy of desire that characterizes commercial sex in Thailand today. (*End of comment by R. Bishop and L. S. Robinson*)]

Government Surveillance of Commercial Sex Workers

A system of monitoring sex workers has been in place because the government has long implicated them for the spread of STDs (Rojanapithayakorn & Hanenberg 1996). Most "direct" sex workers in Thailand are under the STD monitoring system, which the Department of Communicable Disease Control (DCDC) has adapted over a period of 40 years. There are hundreds of government STD/AIDS clinics all over Thailand, each keeping a logbook of its local commercial sex establishments. The logbook contains location of the businesses, and it is frequently updated with the help of STD patients who show up for services. The officers semiannually visit these establishments to assess the numbers of sex workers and other changes; their enumeration of establishments has been reported regularly since 1971.

In 1990, the Sentinel Surveillance reported that each sex worker had an average of two customers per night, with the

mean of 2.6 for direct sex workers, and 1.4 for indirect sex workers (unpublished data, cited in Rojanapithayakorn & Hanenberg 1996). In 1994, the compiled lists of commercial sex establishments showed 37 different kinds of sex businesses, mostly concentrated in Bangkok and provincial towns. The report also showed there were on average 67 commercial sex establishments in most provinces, with an average of 663 female sex workers per province. The total number of sex workers who worked in listed establishments was approximately 67,000 in 1994. These numbers reflect sex workers who are under the surveillance system by the government.

Vithayasai and Vithayasai (1990) provided the first evidence that by 1988, HIV was already spreading among female sex workers and their customers in northern Thailand. Many other studies have consistently shown that female sex workers in the north have disproportionately higher rates of HIV infection than those in other parts of Thailand; brothel-based female sex workers were found to have an HIV incidence of 20 seroconversions per 100 person-years of follow-up (cited in Mastro & Limpakarnjanarat 1995). In 1994, the national median prevalence of HIV infection was 27% among brothel-based commercial sex workers (Division of Epidemiology, Thai Ministry of Public Health; data cited in Mastro & Limpakarnjanarat 1995).

Female sex workers have many barriers to having protected sex with their clients, for example, clients' insistence on not using condoms (Pramualratana, Podhisita, et al. 1993), lack of negotiation strategies (Brinkmann 1992), clients' healthy and attractive appearance and the sex workers' trust in "regular" acquainted clients (Wawer et al. 1996), and alcohol use by either the client or the sex workers (Mastro & Limpakarnjanarat 1995). However, this picture has changed dramatically by the mid-1990s, as the government's nationwide 100 Percent Condom Program came into effect. Whereas the 1989 survey of sex workers found that 14% of their sex acts were with a condom, the rate increased to over 90% in December 1994 (Rojanapithayakorn & Hanenberg 1996; see more discussion in Section 10B, HIV/AIDS).

Male Commercial Sex Workers

The number of male sex workers in Thailand has been estimated to be approximately 5,000 to 8,000 (Brinkmann 1992), a number much smaller than the estimates of female sex workers. Although there are very few studies on male sex workers, a study has provided a glimpse of the demographics and sexual behavior of men who work in gay bars with commercial sex (Sittitrai, Phanuphak, et al. 1989). Many of these men, referred to in Thai as "business boys," stated that their primary sexual attraction was for women. They reported that their sexual behavior outside of the bars was predominately heterosexual and many had sex with female sex workers for sexual pleasure. Similar findings were found in the study of male commercial sex workers in northern Thailand: 58% of them described themselves as preferring female partners outside of work, and 14% of all men were married (Kunawararak et al. 1995).

At the beginning of the 1990s, male sex workers' HIV seroprevalence remained comparatively low compared to the alarmingly high rates in female sex workers, and this was hypothesized to be because of the male sex workers' use of condoms from early on in the HIV epidemic. However, recent findings can no longer sustain this optimism. In a recent study (Kunawararak et al. 1995) in which male sex workers were followed prospectively from 1989 to 1994, their HIV prevalence increased from 1.4% to 20%, with an overall incidence of 11.9 per 100 person-years, a rate con-

siderably higher than those found in any other groups of Thai men.

Most sex workers in Thailand enter the commercial sex business in their late teens or early 20s, and many others in their early teens. The phenomenon of children in commercial sex will be the focus of the following section. However, it is important to note that much of the discussion about the sociocultural factors that lead young women and men into the sex industry will be applicable to both child, adolescent, and adult sex workers as well.

Child Sex Workers

Much to the embarrassment of the Thai officials and activists alike, commercial sex involving children has become a tourist draw to Thailand. The HIV pandemic has fueled the demand of a great number of customers for younger sex workers because of their perceived likelihood of being free of HIV infection and other STDs. In many brothels, children as young as 10 and 11 are promoted by managers as "fresh" and "healthy," and the price is prorated accordingly. In contrast to this myth, child sex workers are reported to have very high HIV seroprevalence, above 50% according to Hiew (1992). New evidence suggests that women who start as sex workers at a young age might be more susceptible to HIV infection than those who start later, even after controlling for the effects from the work duration (van Griensven et al. 1995).

Children proven to be virgins are especially sought after by Chinese and Middle Eastern clients. There is an ancient Chinese myth that "deflowering" a virgin girl will revitalize the sexual potency of an old man and make him prosper in business (O'Grady 1992). Others are sexually attracted to children and adolescents because of their youthful qualities. Because child sex workers are accessible in Thailand, the country has become a tourist destination for those who believe in these myths, as well as pedophiles and ephebophiles around the world. In their own countries, they could be imprisoned, castrated, or killed for being caught having sex with a child. In Thailand, however, their sexual behaviors go unnoticed and only cost them some money.

In theory, sex with children is illegal in Thailand, but the law has rarely been enforced. More-recent external and internal pressures on the exploitation of children in commercial sex have led to some changes, but to what extent is unknown (see below). These pressures also have made it difficult to estimate the number of child sex workers in Thailand, as they are "going underground" (Boonchalaksi & Guest 1994). The estimates have ranged from 30,000 to 40,000 proposed by the Thai Red Cross and Sittitrai and Brown (1991), to 800,000 suggested by the Center for the Protection of Children's Rights. Estimates have been calculated based upon the ratio of child to adult sex workers, with children making up 20 to 40% of all the sex workers in Thailand. The most-scientific report available to us has estimated the prevalence of child sex workers to be 36,000 (Guest 1994). This number comprises 1.7% of the female population who are below the age of 18.

The buying and selling of child sex workers in Thailand is a lucrative business, as it is elsewhere in Asia (*End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism*, ECPAT, 1992, cited in Kaime-Atterhog, Ard-Am, and Sethaput 1994). Girls and boys (albeit mostly girls) are brought into Thailand from the hill tribe areas, Myanmar (Burma), China, Kampuchea (Cambodia), and Laos (Friends of Women Foundation 1992). In addition, they are also bought from rural Thailand for as high as US\$8,000 (Serrill 1993) and brought to the cities and larger tourist locations. Farmers under greater economic pressures have been forced to make many sacrifices, including sending

their children to work in the cities in order to send money home (Srisang 1990). These farmer parents are not always aware that their children are to become sex workers. In other cases, the entry into the sex industry does not happen until after an initial period of working in other low-paying jobs.

The business of finding job placements in the cities for rural children is not a new phenomenon. However, the growth of this business, and its connection to the sex industry, have been boosted by the socioeconomic shift in recent decades, and now it can be found in most parts of the country. As Thailand is moving toward the status of a newly industrialized country (NIC), most of the rapid economic development is concentrated in urbanization and industrialization. Although all socioeconomic strata have enjoyed their share of the country's economic boom, income inequalities have widened and poverty persists (Pyne 1994). Wealth is concentrated in the cities, while the rural poor are becoming more and more landless, and profits from their domestic businesses in rural areas are diminishing. Poverty, combined with the women's obligation to provide for their parents, and the lack of job opportunities for unskilled laborers, create an enormous pressure that has forced many Thai women to consider the sex industry as an occupation.

While many children and young women have been bought, most available data suggest that the process is not involuntary or forced. Hantrakul (1988, quoted in Manderson 1992) has pointed out that, "More and more prostitutes . . . have shown their strong determination in stepping in the profession. Sex is harnessed to an economic end. Men are seen as targets, a source of income" (p. 467). Data from van Griensven et al. (1995) support this notion: When asked how they entered commercial sex, 58% of the female sex workers said it was their own decision, and 37% said a friend or relative had advised them. Only 3% reported that they were either sold by their parents or recruited by an agent or employer. A number of the women, 14%, also had one or more sisters in commercial sex. Poverty was the most common reason for entering the profession, reported by 58% of the women.

After years of living through the sociocultural changes that have put more strains on rural women, being a sex worker to support one's family has become an acceptable value in several communities in the north. Some children go into this business without reservation and with full parental permission and support. Many of these girls return home with honor, marry, and repeat the cycle by sending their own daughters into the sex business when they come of age (Phongpaichit 1982; Limanonda 1993). This phenomenon is also true of some of the hill tribe villagers. Almost all sex workers are clear about their desire to quit working in the sex industry once their goals of income are met, and many would return to their native villages to marry and take care of their parents. Upon reintegration into the village, women who have worked as sex workers may be subject to condemnation, but it is usually based not on their prostitution, but on their having sex outside of marriage (Manderson 1992). This offense, however, can be amended by their active accumulation of merit, such as caretaking of parents and helping local charities. In any case, many women have already been recognized by family and the community for their previous remittances during the years of work in the city, as their financial contributions are already evident in the family's house, motorcycle, and even donations to the local temple. Although the cults of ancestral spirits (*phii puu yaa*) frown upon women's premarital sex, the act of kinship loyalty and filial piety is considered adequate to propitiate the spirits. In fact, when commercial sex agents recruit women from the villages, they frequently offer some "customary

payments" to the family and the ancestral spirits much like a brideprice. With an income up to 25 times the median income of women in factories and clerical jobs (Phongpaichit 1982), sex workers can easily redress their sexual misdeeds by their generous support of kinship.

Nonetheless, other evidence suggests that many children and families are deceived by the brokers, and that the children are led to believe they will go to the cities to work as domestic servants or waiters/waitresses, only to find themselves forced into commercial sex. Sometimes, coercion takes the form of financial threats rather than physical confinement of the women. Many women must continue working to earn the sum of money for which their families are indebted to the commercial sex agents. For example, 31% of the female sex workers in van Griensven's study (1995) reported they were in debt to their employer. Worse cases are seen in women in commercial sex businesses in foreign countries. In a 1993 article in *Time* magazine, Hornblower (1993) reported that numerous Thai women are working in Japan as "virtual indentured sex slaves" in bars controlled by Japanese gangsters. These women, mostly from rural villages of Thailand, are usually sold by Thai brokers for an average of US\$14,000 each, and then resold to the clubs by Japanese brokers for about US\$30,000. The women are obligated and threatened to work under hostile circumstances to earn this sum of money, but very few can.

The recent concern about child sex workers in Thailand seems to have been fueled by the awareness of the HIV pandemic and the growing anguish about child victimization around the world. Initially, the pressure for a governmental policy towards child sex workers came from foreign sources, with the pressure more recently internalized. When the government of Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai took office in 1992, he promised to eliminate child sex workers during his term of office. Impressive work has been done by the Task Force to End Child Exploitation in Thailand, a coalition of 24 government and private agencies dedicated to exposing European links of child sex trade in Thailand (Serrill 1993). Brothels in Thailand known to employ children were raided and closed, and the events were highly publicized in Thai newspapers (Kaime-Atterhog et al. 1994). However, data are still lacking regarding the extent of success in reducing the child sex trade. Although some reports have mentioned the age restriction that sex workers must be at least 18 years old (e.g., Kunawararak et al. 1995), statistics still show a small number of female sex workers under 15 years old in brothels (e.g., van Griensven et al. 1995).

Sociocultural Factors Behind the Entry to Commercial Sex

One consistent finding across many studies of female and child sex workers is that a large number come from the northern provinces of Thailand (Redd Barna 1989; Archavanitkul & Havanon 1990; van Griensven et al. 1995; Wawer et al. 1996). It has been theorized that these young women are especially in demand because of the long-held admiration for their lighter skin compared to their counterparts in the northeast or the south of the country. Others have theorized that working in the sex business is a tradition long present in the north. Formerly part of the kingdom of Lanna, this part of the country was more often at war with other kingdoms and had a history of being colonized. It was the custom to use women from the area to placate the occupying forces through the offering of sex services (Skrobanek 1988).

In addition to these perspectives, others have offered hypotheses that take into account sociocultural factors that are not unique to northern Thailand and are thus applicable to the general Thai culture as well. Lenore Manderson (1992),

for example, eloquently argues that commercial sex, much like Buddhist monasteries, provides alternatives for both men and women to step out of their ordinary cultural roles. For men, the alternative is in the sexual realm; commercial sex provides a sexual outlet for the unmarried men and a way for married men to step temporarily outside their marriage while avoiding a divorce. For young women, she argues, the process of leaving behind (temporarily) their kinship as well as their "normal sexuality" (i.e., sex with affectional ties) gives women an alternative option to become self-sufficient. By supporting themselves and their family through the commoditization of sex, these young women achieve a degree of autonomy without having to enter the role of "mother" or marriage. Traditionally, *mae chii* undergo a similar process of abandoning attachments (in their case, worldly and sexual pleasures) in order to achieve autonomy in the spiritual realm. In a society in which women are expected to be mother or wife, female sex workers and *mae chii* reject both roles in the way they use (or do not use) their bodies and sexuality.

Other scholars, such as Khin Thitsa, Thomas Kirsch, and Charles Keyes, have looked even deeper into the Theravada gender construction for the cultural explanation of commercial sex. Keyes (1984) acknowledges that prostitutes have never been stigmatized in Buddhist societies, because the women still have the opportunity to alter their behavior at some time; prostitutes and courtesans were indeed among the alms of women in early Buddhist society. Despite such tolerance in the Buddhist society, he suggests that the rise of commercial sex in contemporary Thailand has more to do with the emergence the new images of men and women, which are associated with sex without any tempering moral irony found in traditional popular Buddhism. According to Keyes, the decision to enter commercial sex in Thailand today is the women's "participation in the increasingly materialistic culture of Thailand" (p. 236), probably driven by the "secularized image of woman as sex object" (p. 236). A number of scholars and activists have made similar comments. The growth of commercial sex in Thai society cannot be explained by the traditional gender roles in Buddhism; quite the opposite, it thrives on the increasingly consumerist and materialistic nature of the contemporary Thai culture.

On the other hand, Kirsch (1985) argues that women's choice of entering commercial sex is not necessarily at odds with the range of "ideal" female images in Buddhism. In particular, the Buddhist-sanctioned mother-nurturer image of women has found a new expression in the new socio-cultural context, where young rural women have expanded their means of providing for the family to a new arena, "in towns, cities, the nation, and beyond" (p. 313).

C. Pornography and Erotica

The popularity of pornography and erotica in contemporary Thailand cannot be denied, although we were not able to identify formal data on its extent and variety. Erotic magazines and videotapes, most of which are designed for the male customer, are available in street markets, newsstands, and video stores. Imports and unauthorized copies of foreign (mostly American, European, and Japanese) erotica are easily available and popular. Thai-produced erotica tends to be more suggestive and less explicit than the XXX-rated erotica produced in the West. Heterosexual erotica has a greater market, but same-sex erotica is also available.

By exploring the production and consumption of pornographic and erotic materials in Thailand, we can better understand Thai people's attitudes toward this topic, as well as the underlying social constructions of gender and sexuality. While there is no equivalent of the term "pornography," the

nonjudgmental colloquialism is the suffix *po*, (“nude”) added to the format of the medium (e.g., books, magazines, pictures, movies, and dances); hence *phaap po* is a nude picture. The more judgmental suffix *laa-mok* (“obscene”) is also used, especially by the press to convey journalistic technicality or even an air of morality. Sex videos are also called *nang ek*, or “X movies,” although censorship in Thailand does not use the nominal rating system used in the United States. There is also a tongue-in-cheek distinction of *po tae mai plueay*, or “nude but not naked,” implying the more discreet depiction of the unclothed bodies.

Although none of these terms indicates the gender of the customers or users, Thai people generally see that pornography is chiefly men’s indulgence, consistent with the idea that vices and sex are men’s recreation.

Depictions of nude female bodies or women in swimsuits on calendars are not an uncommon sight in male-dominated settings, such as bars, construction sites, warehouses, and auto shops. Caucasian and Japanese models are also as popular as Thai models. In fact, until a few decades ago when domestic production of pornography was prohibited by poor technology and strict laws, Thai men relied on pirated copies of Western porn and imported magazines, such as *Playboy*. Hence, the last few generations of Thai men have been exposed to Western sexuality primarily through pornography from Europe and North America. Because these materials portray sexual practices with the variety and explicitness unprecedented in the Thai media, Thai people who are acquainted with Western pornography have come to associate Westerners with sexual disinhibition and hedonism.

Prior to the popularity of videotapes, imported and pirated, Western erotica was available in the underground market in the formats of print, 8-millimeter film, and photographic slides. Illegal prints of Western hardcore pornography, known as *nangsue pok khao*, or “white-cover publication” were produced by small, obscure publishers, and surreptitiously sold in bookstores, by mail order, or by solicitors in public areas. Nationally distributed magazines on display at newsstands and bookstores have burgeoned since the late 1970s. Following the format of American publications such as *Playboy*, these magazines, such as *Man*—among the earliest of its genre—print glossy photographs of Thai female models, and feature regular as well as erotic columns. The proliferation of gay men’s erotic magazines followed in the mid-1980s.

The legal status of these magazines, straight and gay, is somewhat ambiguous. While sometimes up to 20 or 30 different publications compete on the newsstands for years, the police have also made numerous raids on publishers and bookstores that carry these so-called “obscene” magazines. Such raids often follow a moral surge in politics or an administrative reform in the police department. Similar arrests have been made with the video rental stores that carry pornographic films. Interestingly, grounds for objection to these pornographic materials have never been based on the material’s unauthorized status or even the exploitation of women. As known by all the customers and providers of pornography in Thailand, the disapproval is because of the “sex and obscenities” involved. In news coverage of these raids, officials commonly espouse Buddhist moral messages about sexual stoicism and, less often, the degradation of the *kulasatrii* image. Thai censorship of films has also been stricter on sexual matters than on violence, even when the sex or body exposure appears in nonexploitative contexts. In formality and the law, the Thai society is more sex-negative than what its sex industry has led most outsiders to believe.

The depiction of the Thai female models in Thai erotic magazines for heterosexual men is perhaps an embodiment

of the modern, urban “bad girl” image. Although many of them are indeed recruited from the commercial sex scenes in Bangkok, the glossy images and the accompanying biographies suggest that the models are single, educated, and middle-class adventurous women who do these poses on a one-time-only basis. To the reader, these women might as well be *kulasatrii* elsewhere, but here they let their hair down in front of the camera and become modern, beautiful, and sensual women who are in touch with their sexuality. Neither are these models the ordinary “carefree” women available in the one-night-stand scenes; their model-quality appearance is more than what the reader could expect in those environments. Hence, these models represent a high-end variant of carefree women, characterized by their overwhelming sexual magnetism, an excellent match indeed for men and their boundless sexual desires. A few famous models in the erotica industry have gone on to fashion, music, and acting in television or film with great success.

The image of these celebrity erotica models can be juxtaposed, like the other side of the coin, with that of the beauty-pageant winners, such as Miss Thailand, who also frequently become media celebrities. Both images are of Thai women who achieve success and fame because of their appearance. Pageant contestants and winners always take great pains to extol the virtues of Thai women in their public statements, and many openly object to the pageant’s swimsuit display requirement. Pageant winners invariably stress their “nurturer” ideology by speaking of helping children, the elderly, and the disabled. In contrast, erotica models send off an air of iconoclastic indifference in their seductive, hedonistic, and “I don’t care” statements. Interestingly, women’s indifferent and autonomous attitudes, along the lines of “I am who I am” or “I don’t give a damn,” have become fashionable and used in numerous poetry and song lyrics by female pop stars. This image, however, is not a new image for women in Thai society, because the “bad women” image has always been around. Nevertheless, the tough “I-am-who-I-am” statements are urban women’s announcement of their moral independence, setting them in contrast with the conventional perceptions that women in the sex industry and “carefree” women are fooled into their positions, and that women in general are helpless abiders of societal values. As more and more contemporary women are becoming dissatisfied with the traditional role or the victim stereotype, these iconoclastic sentiments seem refreshing: Adopting the role opposite to a *kulasatrii* by choice is an act of liberation.

Thailand is also famous for its sex shows in the go-go nightclubs (*baa a-go-go*), most notoriously in the red-light districts of Patpong, Pattaya, and Chiangmai. Approaching these performances of dances, sexual tricks, and intercourse as cultural texts, Lenore Manderson (1992) has examined the continuity which links these public sex shows with the disempowerment of women, prostitution, and the Thai social constructions of sex and gender. Although the extreme explicitness and violent themes in these shows undeniably reflect misogyny and subordination of women, she also notices that the themes reflect what Thai people understand about the sexuality of Thai men and of the Westerners in the audience. These acts are what the sex industry thinks will captivate the (mostly) male clientele. The themes thus represent not the everyday sexuality, but the erotic possibilities on the edge of male libidinal fantasy, their “wildest dreams.”

Salient in the imageries designed to excite, thrill, or even shock the male customers is the ruleless, “anything goes” atmosphere. Disinhibition pervades the bars in which customers have quick access to sex on the premises. The unpredictable, even improbable, performances, including genital ma-

nipulation of objects or snakes, and sex between women, all affirm a polysexual theme. Another theme designed to excite is the extreme objectification of women as sex objects for sale. Sex workers are numbered for customers' selection, and their nakedness (or uniform bar costume) enhances their anonymity. Finally, there is a theme of satire in which men are insulted and parodied for their fear of the female genitalia, the widespread touch taboo and gender segregation are overturned, and the Thai gender-power hierarchy toppled. Naked women dance on a raised platform, literally placing men under the female genitalia (Manderson 1992).

9. Contraception, Abortion, and Population Planning

A. Contraception and Population Control

Thailand is extremely proud of its relatively high rates of contraceptive use and successful population control. Birthrates have been declining over the years. In 1995, the Institute for Population and Social Research at Mahidol University reported that the natural growth rate was about 1%. The fertility rates have also decreased significantly in the last few decades, from six births per woman in the 1960s to two births per woman in the late 1980s (cited in Pyne 1994).

The contraceptive prevalence rates have increased dramatically in the last two decades, from 15% to 68% among married women (cited in Pyne 1994). Contraceptive methods are readily available and utilized (Sittitrai et al. 1992). Common methods of contraception in Thailand include hormone pills and injections, intrauterine devices (IUDs), vaginal inserts, rhythm, condoms, withdrawal, vasectomy, and female tubal ligation. For women, the contraceptive hormonal pill is by far the more-preferred method. However, the most-prevalent method today is female sterilization, followed by the pill, while the least-popular method is the condom (cited in Pyne 1994).

The success of contraception in Thailand has been invariably linked to Mechai Viravaidya, the man *Time* magazine called "a champion of condoms, a pusher of the Pill, a voice for vasectomies." ("The Good News," *Time* 1989). Launched by Viravaidya in 1974, the private nonprofit organization, Population and Community Development Association (PDA), has tackled overpopulation by promoting family planning and distributing birth control devices. The PDA proactively places temporary birth control clinics where people gather, in bus terminals, village fairs, and buffalo markets. At these unconventional sites, they dispense condoms and the pill; free IUDs and vasectomies are even offered on special occasions. Playful but persuasive jingles promoting family planning punctuate music and soap operas on the radio, reaching every household in Thailand. Helped by his humor, creativity, and charisma, the success of the PDA and Viravaidya can be seen in the growing financial support from the government. Moreover, Thai people now use the term *mechai* as a slang term for condoms.

In the *Partner Relations Survey* (Sittitrai et al. 1992), the research participants reported that condoms were readily available. Considerable proportions of the participants reported having used them some time in their lifetimes: 52% of the men, 22% of the women, or 35% overall. Attitudes toward condoms were not especially surprising. Most men feared a lack of pleasure or diminished sexual performance with the use of the condom, and couples found using condoms threatening to the trust in their relationship.

Recently, the heightened HIV awareness and the government-sanctioned 100 Percent Condom Program have significantly increased the use of condoms, especially in the con-

text of commercial sex (see also Sections 8B, Significant Unconventional Sexual Behaviors, Prostitution, and 10B, HIV/AIDS). Although the government received condoms from foreign donors before 1990, all condoms provided to sex workers since 1990 have been bought by the country's own funds (Rojanapithayakorn & Hanenberg 1996). In 1990, the government distributed about 6.5 million condoms; in 1992, they spent US\$2.2 million to buy and distribute 55.9 million condoms. Commercial sex workers receive as many free condoms as they require from government STD clinics and outreach workers. On the national level, the recent increase in condom use has been documented to relate in time and magnitude with the overall decline of STDs and HIV incidence.

B. Abortion

Abortion is illegal in Thailand except when performed for medical reasons. Most Thais are strongly anti-abortion, mainly because of the First Precept of Buddhism which prohibits killing of living beings. In general, "living beings" are interpreted as people, animals, and sometimes small creatures, but most Thais also see this Precept as pertaining to the aborting of a fetus as well. Again, premarital or extramarital sex is frowned upon and there is little sympathy for the woman who becomes pregnant out of wedlock. She is most likely to be viewed as at fault for becoming pregnant, because only women (not men) can control their sexual desire. Thus, abortion has often been associated with a lack of morals and virtue on the woman's part.

In Ford and Kittisuksathit's study (1994), the young women who worked in factories were well aware of the dilemma of premarital pregnancy in the lives of their friends or siblings. Most expressed great concerns about unwanted, premarital pregnancy, which is a clear indicator of "sinful behavior" they have committed. In discussing the consequences of sex, women mostly talked about the feared premarital pregnancy, with allusions to "baby dumping," infanticide, and abortion, whereas young men focused on issues of STD and HIV. Most women expressed the hope that their partner would care for and marry them, and the child could be kept. Other young women clearly insisted that they would seek an abortion because they were emotionally and financially not ready for having a child. The blame for unwanted pregnancy, as expressed by both the young men and women, was placed on the woman for "allowing" intercourse to occur.

Apart from the social stigma, there are other important reasons behind Thai women's decision to have abortion. Pregnancy presents a grave problem for women in low-paying jobs in which employers have little tolerance of absenteeism (Pyne 1994). Having a child in urban environments is expensive, and, because few companies offer support for maternal and childcare, a woman risks losing her employment because of the additional task of parenting. For rural women who migrate to work in the cities, losing their jobs means jeopardizing their only source of income on which they and their family upcountry depend.

In curious contrast to the prevailing anti-abortion attitudes, abortion is not rare in practice. Illegal abortion clinics, many of which are run by nonprofessional women, offer traditional but unsafe techniques of abortion, such as forceful massage or injecting chemicals into the uterus. Thorbek (1988) has documented experiences of women who had undergone such traumatic procedures and the adverse health consequences. A more-pragmatic approach has been developed in recent years, thereby allowing women to have safe, confidential abortion operations in many urban clinics. In these clinics, medically trained professionals use standard

medical procedures, such as suction, to remove the fetus. Never advertising openly, these urban clinics rely on word of mouth to draw clients, and fairly large fees are charged. To date, there has not been a Thai-equivalent of the Western movement that has gained recognition of a women's right to choose to have an abortion.

10. Sexually Transmitted Diseases and HIV/AIDS

A. Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Thailand reports high rates of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). In the *Partner Relations Survey* (Sittitjai et al. 1992), the lifetime prevalence rates of STDs were 49% among urban men and 33% among rural men, or 38% overall. Much lower proportions of women reported a history of STDs: 11% in urban women and 9% in rural women, or 10% overall. Gonorrhea and nongonococcal urethritis (NGU) were the most common STDs in male participants, whereas chlamydia and urethritis were the most common in female participants. Knowledge about STD prevention and treatment was inadequate, especially in the face of the HIV pandemic. Data from military conscripts have confirmed the linkage between STDs and HIV infection. In these young men from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, HIV infection was strongly associated with a history of STDs (Nelson et al. 1996), particularly a positive serology for syphilis, a history of gonorrhea, syphilis, genital herpes, genital warts, and genital ulcers (Beyrer et al. 1995).

Almost all STD cases in Thailand could be traced to commercial sex. In a 1989 report, 96% of male clients at government STD clinics attributed their infection to having had sex with a sex worker (cited in Rojanapithayakorn & Hanenberg 1996). The government STD clinics carry out the Ministry of Public Health's sentinel surveillance (previously described in Section 8B, Significant Unconventional Sexual Behaviors, Prostitution) and have notably provided STD-related services to the general population and medical examinations to sex workers for at least 20 years. Although sex workers are encouraged to have a weekly examination, records show that they visited government STD clinics only once every seven weeks in 1994. Male sex workers have been also included in sentinel surveillance since 1989 (Kunawarak et al. 1995). In addition, these clinics trace the partners of individuals with STD. The male clients are asked to name the establishments from which they might have contracted STD, and outreach workers are then dispatched for further tests or scheduling treatment for the sex workers. The government STD clinics also have good collaboration with the police offices, allowing enforcement against uncooperative establishments.

B. HIV/AIDS

HIV was first detected in Thailand in 1984 (Limsuwan, Kanapa & Siristonapun 1986). The government was slow to respond to the pandemic and its entry into Thailand. Economic pressures created by the need for tourist dollars and the early low numbers of actual AIDS cases slowed the government's response to the pandemic (Sricharatchanya 1987).

This slow response caught Thai governmental officials and healthcare providers unprepared for the rapid explosion of new cases of HIV infection and AIDS. Infection rates remained quite low through 1987, mostly affecting men who had sex with men. Then, there was a rapid increase in seroprevalence among injecting drug users (IDUs). In 1988, 86% of known seropositive cases were among IDUs, 4% were men who had sex with men, and 2% were heterosexual women. By 1990, another shift had oc-

curred and shortly thereafter, female sex workers showed extremely high seroprevalence rates. This phase of the pandemic was first detected in northern Thailand in 1989 (Limanonda, Tirasawat, & Chongvatana 1993; Vithayasai & Vithayasai 1990). As injecting drug use was shown to be very rare among sex workers, heterosexual intercourse was then identified as a potentially effective mode of HIV transmission in Thailand. In 1991, the HIV seroprevalence among urban brothel sex workers in a northern province rose to 49% (Ministry of Public Health 1991). Because many Thai men have unprotected sex inside and outside of their marriage, high rates of HIV infection were soon detected not only in sex workers, but also in their clients, pregnant women, and newborns. The 1994 national median prevalence rates of HIV infection were 8.5% among men attending STD clinics, and 1.8% among women attending prenatal clinics (Division of Epidemiology, Thai Ministry of Public Health; data cited in Mastro & Limpakarnjanarat 1995).

A series of studies have focused on the men newly conscripted to the military in order to infer the extent of HIV infection among Thai men at large. Prior to 1993, the HIV-seroprevalence rates in these northern conscripts ranged between 10% and 13% (Beyrer et al. 1995; Nelson et al. 1996), considerably higher than the rates among conscripts from other parts of the country. Some unique sexual patterns of the young men in northern Thailand have been linked to their greater risk of HIV infection. When compared to men from other provinces, upper-northern young men were more likely to have initiated sexual activity at a younger age—before age of 16—to have had their first experience with a female sex worker, to have had more-frequent sexual contacts with sex workers, and to have reported a history of STDs (Nopkesorn, Mastro et al. 1993; Nopkesorn, Sweat et al. 1993).

Estimates have indicated that the number of persons living with HIV totals several hundreds of thousands (Division of Epidemiology, MOPH 1984-1993). The forecast is grim in terms of further HIV infection and its socioeconomic impact on the entire country (Sittitjai et al. 1992). However, by the mid-1990s, there has been some good news of behavioral change and decreasing new cases of HIV infection. Paralleling the success of the mass advertising campaign and the 100 Percent Condom Program, condom use in commercial sex increased from 14% of the sex acts in 1989 to 90% of the sex acts in 1994 (Rojanapithayakorn & Hanenberg 1996). As the government distributed massive amounts of condoms to commercial sex establishments all over the country, the incidence of STDs correspondingly decreased by over 85%. Meanwhile, the HIV seroprevalence among the military conscripts from northern Thailand declined from 10.4% in 1991 to 6.7% in 1995 (Nelson et al. 1996). New conscripts have greater proportions of men who never had sex with sex workers, and greater proportions of men who never had STDs.

Initiated in 1989 on a small-scale basis, the widely successful 100 Percent Condom Program was later adopted nationwide, with participation from every province in Thailand by April 1992 (Rojanapithayakorn & Hanenberg 1996). The program promotes condom use by sex workers and their clients without exception. Sex workers are instructed to withhold service and refund the fee upon the client's refusal to use a condom. The program utilizes the preexisting structures of the police and the Ministry of Public Health's STD surveillance system to enforce compliance from commercial sex establishments. STDs, monitored by the hundreds of government STD clinics around the country, are used as a marker of noncompliance with the program. When the source of STD is

traced to a noncompliant establishment, temporary or indefinite closure of the business by the police is warranted. With the cooperation from every sex establishment, customers quickly learn that they cannot go elsewhere to find a sex worker who would allow unprotected sex, and the commercial sex establishments understand that they are not losing clients to competitors.

[Update 2002: UNAIDS Epidemiological Assessment: Thailand was the first country in Asia to document HIV epidemics among injection drug users and female sex workers and their clients. After a brief period of denial, the country organized a national program, supervised from the highest levels of government, to respond to the epidemic.

[Thailand has a comprehensive HIV Sentinel Surveillance (HSS) system, started in 14 provinces in 1989 and expanded to all 76 provinces by 1990. The system includes blood donors, antenatal clinic attendees, injection drug users, male STD clinic patients, and both direct (brothel-based) and indirect (massage parlors and others) female sex workers. HIV data on injection drug users have been supplemented by separate serosurveys.

[Surveillance data indicate that HIV prevalence peaked among female sex workers and their clients in the mid-1990s and has since been slowly decreasing. In Bangkok, 1% of injection drug users were HIV-positive in late 1987, increasing to 30% by the end of 1998; since then, HIV prevalence among injection drug users tested has remained between 20% and 50% both in and outside Bangkok. As of the end of 2001, an estimated 1.79% of the population aged 15 to 49 years was infected with HIV.

[HIV/AIDS is monitored and projected by the Thai Working Group on HIV/AIDS Projection. Estimates developed in 2000 indicate that approximately 2% of men and 1% of women are living with HIV; infection levels among adult males will remain above 1.5% until the end of 2006. Until the end of 2006, over 50,000 will die annually from AIDS-related causes; over 90% of these deaths will occur in people aged 20 to 44.

[Recognizing that most HIV transmissions were occurring through commercial sex, efforts focused on reducing the number of males visiting female sex workers and on promoting condom use in all commercial and casual sexual contacts. These efforts substantially changed levels of risk behavior. The percentage of adult men visiting female sex workers has fallen from almost 25% of the population to roughly 10%, and condom use when visiting sex workers has become the norm. The success of Thailand's "100 percent condom program" has not had much effect on the slow but steady transmission of HIV from infected male clients of female sex workers or from infected male injection drug users to their regular sex partners. There has also been limited success in reducing HIV prevalence among the injection drug user population. At present, 670,000 are living with HIV/AIDS; close to 30,000 new infections occur each year. The Ministry of Public Health budget for HIV decreased following the crisis in 1997; many of the international donors who left Thailand during the economic boom years have not returned.

[The estimated number of adults and children living with HIV/AIDS on January 1, 2002, were:

Adults ages 15-49:	650,000 (rate: 1.8%)
Women ages 15-49:	220,000
Children ages 0-15:	21,000

[An estimated 55,000 adults and children died of AIDS during 2001.

[At the end of 2001, an estimated 290,000 Thai children under age 15 were living without one or both parents who had died of AIDS. (End of update by the Editors)]

11. Sexual Dysfunctions, Counseling, and Therapies

Within Thai psychiatry and psychology, there has not been much focus on the treatment of sexual dysfunctions or disorders. There is recognition of some sexual dysfunctions, but it is mostly limited to male erectile or ejaculatory problems. Vernacular expressions exist for these male sexual dysfunctions, suggesting Thai people's familiarity with these phenomena. For example, *kaam tai daan* means "sexual unresponsiveness" in men or women. There are a few terms for male erectile dysfunction: the playful *nokkhaio mai khan* ("the dove doesn't coo") and the more cruel *ma-khuea phao* ("roasted eggplant"; Allyn 1991). Another slang, *mai soo* ("not up for a fight"), suggests an injury on the man's male pride for not being able to enter a "battle" with prowess. Premature ejaculation is referred to with a playful yet humiliating analogy *nokkra-jok mai than kin naam*, or "faster than a sparrow can sip water."

The incidence of various sexual dysfunctions have not yet been investigated. However, in the past two or three decades, many sex columns have appeared in the mainstream newspapers and magazines, offering advice and counsel in rather sexually explicit, but technical, detail. These are most often written by physicians who claim expertise in treating sexual problems and disorders. Other columnists in women's fashion and housekeeping magazines present themselves as older, experienced women who offer sage advice to younger ones about sex and relationships. The concepts of "squeeze technique" or "start-stop" techniques have been introduced to the typical middle-class Thai through these extremely popular advice columns.

A more systematic and academic effort to establish therapeutic services for sexual dysfunctions is underway. In the proposal for a multi-component interdisciplinary Program for the Promotion of Sexual Health (to be housed within the Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok), Nikorn Dusitsin (1995) included a counseling clinic and hotline counseling as one of the program's main components. Responding to the need for more sex counselors and educators, the program also contains workshops and courses aimed at training intermediate-level educators, including social workers, teachers, and military personnel, in order to provide sexuality counseling and education. Dusitsin proposed a problem-based, participatory format for the curricula of these intensive workshops. The content of the curriculum was proposed to combine physiology, psychology, and sociocultural contexts.

12. Sex Research and Advanced Professional Education

In a review of the history of sex research in Thailand, Chanya Sethaput (1995) noted the remarkable changes in methodologies and scope of sex research before and after the HIV epidemic in Thailand. These differences lent themselves to a pragmatic classification of pre- and post-AIDS eras of Thai sex research. She noted that only a handful of sex surveys were conducted before the HIV epidemic started in Thailand in 1984. In the pre-AIDS era, she identified the earliest study in 1962 in which the focus was on attitudes towards dating and marriage. In fact, most of the pre-AIDS research was concerned with the attitudes and knowledge in premarital sex, extramarital sex, cohabitation of unmarried couples, sexually transmitted diseases, and abortion. Sampled mostly from the educated, urban populations, such as college or high-school students, these early studies found gender differences in the attitudes of men and women, confirming the existence of a double standard in the sexual domain. Assessment of sexual behaviors was more of an excep-

tion than a rule. Early findings on sexual knowledge among Thai people had been used in the design of a curriculum for sexuality education, which was later enforced by the Ministry of Education in schools across the country.

An abundance of studies have emerged after the first cases of AIDS were identified in Thailand about 1984. Driven by a public-health agenda, the post-AIDS sex research expanded its objectives to include more-diverse questions (Sethaput 1995). Initially focused on "high-risk groups" such as sex workers and "gay" men, the populations of interest subsequently expanded to the customers of commercial sex (college students, soldiers, fishermen, truck drivers, and construction and factory workers), spouses and partners of men who visited sex workers, and other "vulnerable" groups, such as adolescents, and pregnant women. Present samples are no longer limited to convenience samples in urban cities or colleges, but include also rural villages, housing projects for the poor, and work sites, for example. Face-to-face interviews, which previously would have been difficult or unacceptable, have become a more-common assessment method, along with focus-group discussions and other qualitative techniques. Sexual behaviors have become more prominent in the researchers' inquiry, as questionnaires and interview schedules have become increasingly candid and explicit, with a newfound assumption that respondents are more open about sexuality. Previously ignored topics have become main research questions, for example, AIDS knowledge, attitudes toward condoms, masturbation, and same-gender attraction and homosexuality. New research questions have also attempted to identify vulnerability factors to HIV-risk behavior. Guided by the theory of reasoned behavior and the health-belief model, this entails the assessments of psychological variables and individual differences.

Sethaput (1995) briefly reviewed findings, which have formed the basis of the current understanding of sexuality in Thailand. The following findings are now widely known and accepted:

- most populations have a saturation of knowledge regarding HIV transmission,
- extramarital and premarital sexual practices are common in men,
- married women are often well aware of their husbands' use of commercial sex,
- there is a double standard regarding gender and sexual expressions for men and women, and
- the discovery of new, evolving sexual patterns, such as the formation of a sexual network among unmarried men and women in urban settings.

This accrued fund of knowledge from cumulative research has also formed the foundation of our review in this chapter.

A recent publication on *General Sex Education* by Wasikasin, Aimpradit, et al. (1994) represents a renewed and integrative energy in sexology and research in Thailand (1994). This work, published by the Thammasat University, Bangkok, was written by two social workers, two physicians, and a lawyer. As a textbook, it offers an unprecedented integration of disciplines, and its attention to psychosocial contexts is far from the sole emphasis on reproductive biology common in earlier publications.

To date, there is no training in sexological research *per se*. Most researchers in the area of HIV/AIDS have received training from Western institutions, or have applied their basic training in other areas of research to sexual topics. There are a few notable sexologists, for example, Dr. Suwattana Aribarg at the Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. Dr. Aribarg and her husband give lectures in human sexuality to medical students and she provides counseling through the

Chulalongkorn Psychiatric Clinic. Other sex researchers in various institutes and universities in Thailand have also put forth their efforts to the academic and public attention, and many have gradually received greater national and international recognition over the years.

In late 1995, the Mahidol University Institute for Population and Social Research organized an important seminar on sex research. Charged with enthusiasm, the event brought together key sex researchers in Thailand and their body of knowledge, symbolizing a renaissance of sex research in Thailand. Fongkaew (1995), for example, delineated basic paradigms and constructs commonly used in sex research, and cautioned Thai sex researchers to be aware of their own assumptions and values. Some researchers challenged fellow researchers to theorize and problematize data on sexuality and gender, pushing toward the formation of a theoretical model that could capture the sexual complexities in Thailand. Other researchers urged that investigations must be led by pragmatic implications; much data are still needed for the advancement of social issues, for example, the improvement of the status of women and increasing social acceptance of gays and lesbians. Key ingredients for effective interventions are yet to be identified, especially the often overlooked "positive factors" which might protect individuals from behavioral or attitudinal problems. Finally, there was a consensus that researchers should take a more-assertive role in making specific recommendations based on the findings from their research.

As of 1995, advanced education in human sexuality was not available in Thailand, and most Thai scholars still needed to study abroad. In the aforementioned seminar on sex research in Thailand, Dusitsin (1995) stated that the training of new sexological researchers was one of the priorities of his proposed Program for the Promotion of Sexual Health. Through the efforts of the Asian Federation of Sexology and the World Association for Sexology, increasing numbers of Thai sexologists have been identified. The first sexological organization in Thailand, the Sexology Society, was formed in May, 1995. The organization, chaired by Dr. Nikorn Dusitsin, is located at the Institute of Health Research, Chulalongkorn University, in Bangkok.

Summary

Sexuality in Thailand, like the country's peaceful yet interesting coexistence of peoples and cultures, is a convergence of values and practices resulting from admixing of cultures over the centuries. In recent years, these sexual attitudes and behaviors have undergone enormous changes influenced by the rapid economic growth, urbanization, exposure to Western cultures, and, most recently, the HIV epidemic. While economic growth has afforded the country more-effective population control and improved public health services, certain strata of the society have suffered from socioeconomic pressures. The growth of tourism, combined with the indigenous attitudes toward sexuality, commercial sex, and homosexuality, have provided fertile grounds for the commercial sex industry to flourish in Thailand despite its illegal status. Exploitation of children for commercial sex purposes, and the high rates of HIV infection among sex workers and the population at large, are some of the many problems that have followed. The rise of HIV infection has caused Thai people to question and challenge many sexual norms and practices, most notably the men's rite-of-passage practice of having the first sexual intercourse with a female sex worker.

Although well known for their general tolerance and harmony, the lack of conflicts or hostility in the Thai society

does not necessarily indicate that Thai people always maintain embracing attitudes about gender inequality, homosexuality, abortion, or sexuality in general. The Third Buddhist Precept clearly prohibits sex that causes sorrow in others, such as irresponsible and exploitative sex, adultery, sexual coercion, and abuse. Other phenomena, such as masturbation, prostitution, subordination of women, and homosexuality, remain uncertain. Most of the current attitudes about these practices can be traced to non-Buddhist sources. Today, these non-Buddhist beliefs are primarily a blend between indigenous concepts (e.g., class structures, animism, and gender codes) and Western ideologies (e.g., capitalism and medical and psychological theories of sexuality).

Thailand is noted for being a male-dominated patriarchal society, and the gender roles and expectations for Thai men and women differ accordingly. Despite the fact that many Thai men in the past had households with many wives, polygamy is no longer socially or legally acceptable. Mutual monogamy as well as emotional commitment constitute today's ideal marriage. Traditionally, men and women in Thai society depend on each other for the fulfillment of both religious and secular goals, as well as their needs for love and passion. Despite such reciprocal needs, the existence of power differential is clear, and it may have been affirmed by the gender hierarchy sanctioned by Theravada Buddhism. Passion, courtship, romance, and love between men and women are glorified, and the love-inspired sentiments in Thai literature and music can rival the jubilation and pathos in any other culture.

Nonetheless, an uneasy tension between the genders is evident in the way Thai men and women view one another, especially in the areas of intimacy, trust, and sexuality. A double standard for men and women still exists in the practices of premarital and extramarital sex. Manliness, or *chaai chaatrii*, has become increasingly associated with various vices, especially the search for sexual gratification. A man is encouraged to seek sexual pleasure as recreation, and sex with commercial sex workers represents an acceptable and "responsible" behavior to fulfill the sexual desires of single and married men. On the other hand, the dichotomous stereotype of the good-woman/bad-woman exists: a "good" woman, personified in the image of a *kulasatrii*, is expected to be a virgin when she marries and to remain monogamous with her husband; otherwise she is categorized as "bad." Men and women are socialized to maintain distance from the opposite gender. Newer generations of Thai people are finding that the clear-cut traditional gender constructions can no longer explain their evolving, amorphous forms of gender relations.

In the traditional household, Thai women have always excelled at their mother-nurturer role. Outside the household context, women have made tremendous contributions, especially in the areas of the arts, business, and academia. Women are still a long way from achieving equal recognition in the political and religious hierarchies. Today, Thai women struggle with modern realities in the workforce while simultaneously striving toward the positive, if difficult, ideal of a *kulasatrii*.

Another area that has received recent attention is male and female homosexual behaviors. Same-gender sexual behavior was traditionally recognized as associated with the gender-nonconformity among the *kathoey*, who were seen as a "third gender." Indigenously, the *kathoey* were relatively tolerated and often held some special social roles in the community. Previously an undiscussed topic, the Thai vocabulary managed without a word for homosexuality by using a euphemism such as "trees in the same forest" until the past few decades. More recently, the words "gay" and

"lesbian" have been adopted from English, illustrating the search for vocabularies to represent types of homosexualities, which had existed without labels. Homophobia, stereotypes, and misconceptions about homosexuality are common, especially among the middle class who have learned antiquated Western psychiatric theories. On the other hand, gay businesses and the sex industry have grown to significant visibility. Meanwhile, a few advocate groups have emerged to advance their agenda and formulate new social identities for gays and lesbians in Thailand.

Sexological research in Thailand is at an exciting stage. Prompted by the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the controversies regarding the commercial sex industry, large amounts of data have been collected on sexual behaviors and attitudes. Descriptive studies on sexual practices and norms have offered valuable insights into the sexuality of Thai people, although much more data are needed, especially in certain areas not directly associated with public health (e.g., abortion, rape, and incest). Still in its infancy stage, sex therapies and counseling in Thailand are starting to adopt Western psychology, and the providers could learn much more from further research to help customize their services to fit the unique features of the Thai sexuality. Care must be taken when Western models or assumptions are applied to Thai sexual phenomena. Characterized by interwoven traditions over centuries, the people of Thailand defy such simplification, as their constructions of gender and sexuality continue on an evolving course that is as mystifying as it is enlightening.

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