



6-1-2004

# The Implications of Sex Tourism on Mens Social, Psychological, and Physical Health

Kimberly Bender

South County Center Mental Health Services, [kimannbender@hotmail.com](mailto:kimannbender@hotmail.com)

Rich Furman

University of Nebraska-Omaha, [Rfurman@mail.unomaha.edu](mailto:Rfurman@mail.unomaha.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr>

 Part of the [Quantitative, Qualitative, Comparative, and Historical Methodologies Commons](#), and the [Social Statistics Commons](#)

### Recommended APA Citation

Bender, K., & Furman, R. (2004). The Implications of Sex Tourism on Mens Social, Psychological, and Physical Health. *The Qualitative Report*, 9(2), 176-191. Retrieved from <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol9/iss2/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Qualitative Report at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Qualitative Report by an authorized administrator of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact [nsuworks@nova.edu](mailto:nsuworks@nova.edu).

---



**Qualitative Research Graduate Certificate**  
*Indulge in Culture*  
Exclusively Online • 18 Credits  
**LEARN MORE**

NSU  
NOVA SOUTHEASTERN  
UNIVERSITY

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN

## The Implications of Sex Tourism on Mens Social, Psychological, and Physical Health

### **Abstract**

This article explores sex tourism and possible concerns for the male sex tourist through a content analysis of sex tourism web sites. This qualitative, exploratory study describes the manner in which sex tour web sites attract and maintain male customers. Findings related to men's psychosocial health are placed within an international context. Recommendations are made that pertain to international social welfare.

### **Keywords**

Mens psychosocial health, Sex tourism, Sex addiction, International Social Welfare, and HIV/AIDS

### **Creative Commons License**



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

# **The Implications of Sex Tourism on Men's Social, Psychological, and Physical Health**

**Kimberly Bender**

South County Center Mental Health Services, Alexandria, Virginia, USA

**Rich Furman**

University of Nebraska-Omaha, Omaha, Nebraska, USA

---

*This article explores sex tourism and possible concerns for the male sex tourist through a content analysis of sex tourism web sites. This qualitative, exploratory study describes the manner in which sex tour web sites attract and maintain male customers. Findings related to men's psychosocial health are placed within an international context. Recommendations are made that pertain to international social welfare. Key words: Men's psychosocial health, Sex tourism, Sex addiction, International Social Welfare, and HIV/AIDS*

---

## **Introduction**

Sex tourism is a growing social phenomenon engaged in by many western males. While an increasing number of men are participating in adult travel, sex tourism remains a fairly obscure and unknown activity to the general public, academia, and helping professions. This article explores sex tourism and possible concerns for the male sex tourist through a content analysis of sex tourism web sites. This qualitative, exploratory study describes the manner in which sex tour web sites attract and maintain male customers. The data leads to several important implications in regard to men's psychological and social well-being. The authors provide a rationale for the study of sex tourism that includes a brief discussion of the interlocking social problems of sexual addiction and risk of HIV/AIDS infection.

## **A Rationale for Studying Sex Tourism**

Sex or erotic tourism involves male tourists vacationing with the expectation that part or all of their vacation will involve paid sexual experiences. These experiences might range from visiting strippers, using escorts, or engaging in sexual experiences with prostitutes (Evans, Forsyth, & Wooddell, 2000). Sex tourism occurs in several developing countries, but much of the sex tour industry revolves around the areas of the Latin America and the Caribbean, Thailand, and other Southeast Asian countries, and to a lesser extent, the Netherlands (Bishop & Robinson, 1999).

Men make up the majority of sex tour customers (Abu-Nasr, 1998). Primarily men from developed countries, specifically from the United States, Western Europe, and Japan can afford and choose to participate in erotic tours. While there is very limited data on foreign prostitute customers, several studies have explored characteristics of the western male customer of prostitution in the United States. Literature on prostitution in the United States shows that male

customers of prostitution tend to deviate from the traditional stereotype of unattractive and unsuccessful males. Studies show that most male consumers of prostitution are married, college educated, not physically unattractive, have had no trouble finding nonprostitute sex, and earn an average of \$30,000/year (Adams, 1987).

Sex tourism is associated with both the spread of HIV/AIDS as well as other sexually transmitted diseases, and with sexually addicted behaviors. According to the Centers for Disease Control (2001), an estimated 21.8 million people have died from HIV/AIDS since the beginning of the epidemic. Furthermore, it is estimated that 36.1 million people are living with HIV/AIDS today (Safyer & Spies, 1988). UNAIDS (2001) reports that 75-80% of AIDS sufferers in Western Europe and North America are adult males. These reports indicate that 19.6 million men live with HIV/AIDS today (UNAIDS, 2001).

Prostitution is identified as a major HIV/AIDS risk factor. Sex tourism, a form of organized prostitution, should be included in the areas we examine as high-risk behaviors for contracting and spreading the HIV/AIDS virus. Sex tourism creates conditions in which multiple partners participate in anonymous, repeated sexual acts, often without protection. Several interlocking factors make the engagement in sex tourism and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases highly likely.

One such factor is the high socio-economic level of sex tour consumers. To engage in sex tourism, one must have the financial resources to travel to another country and the sufficient leisure time to do so. These factors indicate that most participants in sex tours will be, at least, middle class. Adams (1987) found that physicians often do not question middle and upper class patients regarding their possible contact with prostitutes because these clients do not fit doctors' erroneous stereotypes of consumers of prostitution. Thus, the interplay between sex tour activities and socio-economic stereotypes may create a gap in HIV/AIDS prevention.

Sexual addiction is another consideration that calls for close attention as a factor that may contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS in sex tours. Janet Wolfe (2000) estimates that 7% to 10% of the U.S. population is afflicted with some form of sexually compulsive behavior. The National Council on Sexual Addiction Compulsivity confirms these findings and reports an estimated 16 million-21.5 million Americans are sexual addicts (Cooper, Putnam, Planchon, & Boies, 1999). Several aspects of sexual addiction are highly copasetic with expected sex tour activities.

For the purpose of clarity, we will explore the definition of sexual addiction, as this concept is often misunderstood by scholars and laymen alike. In the classic medical model of addiction, based predominantly on studies of substance abuse, the phenomenon of addiction is associated with tolerance, the need for an increased amount of a substance to produce a desired effect; and withdrawal, an intense physiological craving for the substance. Withdrawal from substance abuse is associated with changes in neurotransmission. No clear research has demonstrated that compulsive sexual behavior involves this physiological response. However, self-identified sex addicts have noted that they have experienced effects similar to these syndromes (The Augustine Fellowship, 1986). Additionally, sexual addiction experts have observed the phenomenon of withdrawal (Carnes, 1993; Earle & Crow, 1989).

However, researchers have historically chosen not to utilize a biological framework. W. P. Canopic and T. P. S. Oei (1989) focus on negative internal or external consequences of behavior. Other authors similarly focus on behavioral consequence as defining sexual addiction. Raviv (1993) asserts that sexual addiction is sexual behavior that begins to interfere with one's day to day functioning, affecting the addict's work, health, and/or personal relationships.

Earl and Crow (1989) suggest three factors in determining if a behavior is addictive. First, there is an overwhelming urge to partake in the behavior. Second, there is an utter disregard for negative consequences related to the behavior. Lastly, there is an inability to stop the behavior no matter how sincerely the addict wants or tries do so.

Carnes (1983) defines sexual addiction similarly to the previous author. His concept of the addictive cycle is a graphic illustration of how sexual addiction works. The addictive cycle is a four stage pattern that moves repeatedly through preoccupation, ritualization, compulsive sexual behavior, and despair.

Several aspects of sex tourism create negative life changes among customers as a direct result of participation. Because erotic tourism is such a financial burden, men may find that their interest in sex tourism is affecting their financial stability and well-being. Furthermore, with reports stating that the majority of men, who engage in prostitution, are married, participation in sex tourism may place men's relationships and personal lives in jeopardy. Finally, with the international spread of HIV/AIDS a major concern, men, who participate in sex tourism, may be putting their health, and the health of partners at home, in danger.

### **Literature on Sex Tourism**

While it is evident that sex tourism is a significant social problem, the current sex tour literature is scarce. Studies examining the links between travel and sex have explored a variety of topic areas, and report that people often are more willing to participate in increasingly risky sexual behaviors while traveling (Bloor, Thomas, Abeni, Goujon, Hausser, Hubert, Kleiber, & Nieto, 1998). Other studies also find that people's sexual inhibitions decrease while on vacation (Thomas, 2000). These studies help to uncover patterns that connect sex and traveling as two compatible leisure activities.

However, during sex tours, sex and travel are more intentionally linked than coincidental sex with fellow vacationers. The tours focus specifically on having foreign sexual experiences that possess elements of gender inequality, male dominance, and the oppression of foreign women (Evans, Forsyth, & Wooddell, 2000). However, literature also suggests that many male tourists are also exploited through their false beliefs, propagated by sex tour agencies, that they may have emotionally satisfying relationships with female prostitutes (Cohen, 1986). Gunther (1998) reports confusion by tourists as to whether they are participating in prostitution, friendships, flirtation, or love. Tourism varies as to whether tourists consider themselves seeking sex or romance, and often tourists ignore the fact they are paying foreign women for sex, in favor of viewing the interaction as an emotional involvement for both parties.

In reference to sex tourism through organized sex tour agencies, Abu-Nasr (1998) reports recent facts and figures of this growing industry in the United States. In her research on the sex tour industry, Abu-Nasr (1998) reports that typical sex tour clients are men aged 35-55. These men are described as ranging from questionable characters to respectable professionals such as judges, attorneys, school board members, clergymen, and even a father treating his son on his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Abu-Nasr (1998) also describes a common sense of denial about HIV/AIDS and other STDs in sex tour countries, specifically Thailand. A brief description of male tourists' attitudes report that men view foreign women as a different class of human, often objectifying them, using them, and benefiting from their economic destitution (Abu-Nasr, 1998).

Chutikul (2002), an advisor in the Office of the Prime Minister in Thailand, writes that sex tourism is growing amongst U.S. business travelers. Chutikul (2002) states that companies are now including sex tours as part of fringe benefits for employees. These new surges of western and European tourists join local men, who regularly visit prostitutes in Thailand, making the sex market a very large industry. Chutikul (2002) reports that sex tourists often travel to Thailand to seek sexual experiences that have grave consequences in their own country. Thus, the sexual behaviors sought by tourists are characterized by a lack of sexual inhibitions and potential risks.

While some literature does exist that explores the phenomena of sex tourism in general, what is missing from the literature is an exploration of the reasons for men's engagement in sex tourism. While this exploratory study did not deductively examine the reasons why men engage in sex tourism, it presents findings that help us explore men's motivations and behaviors. In other words, the findings of this study should not be assumed generalizable. As the expansion of the global economy leads to greater integration of social and economic structures, social service and development programs that address the problems of sex tourism will become more important. Therefore, subsequent literature should fill in the important gap, which this study begins to fill.

## **Methodology**

### **Epistemological and Other Issues of Theory**

Before this study was conducted, the researchers met to discuss epistemological and philosophical issues related to qualitative research, in order to design a methodology appropriate for this study. The authors explored whether this study should be grounded in a particular theoretical orientation, or if it should be more atheoretical, relying instead on the data to help generate relevant themes and theory. The authors explored possibly using feminist theory as a guide through which to create themes prior to data collection, but instead decided to attempt to be as atheoretical as possible, hoping to allow the data to speak for itself. In this sense, the approach taken is most congruent with grounded theory. Strauss and Corbin (1990) assert the importance of generating theory after the collection of data in a grounded theory study. By so doing, theory is thought to organically stem from data, preventing researchers from confirming previously held conceptions.

### **Selves of Researcher and Issues of Trustworthiness**

Patton (2001) posits that due to the importance of the self of the researcher in qualitative research, it is essential for researchers to provide readers with relevant information about themselves. This move towards openness is rapidly becoming associated with the "best practice" of qualitative research (Creswell, 1998; Constan, 1992).

One important issue that sprung from the author's dialogue around theory was the importance of examining bias. Padgett (1998) notes that the ability to be reflexive about one's biases is a key to qualitative research. This may be especially true for a study related to sexual conduct and behavior that may be labeled as deviant by some segments of society. Both researchers admitted to different biases towards men, who engage in sex tourism. The first author admitted to judgments based upon a feminist analysis of the problem. She had to guard against

interpretations in which she focused on themes of oppression and pathology without supporting evidence. As a woman deeply concerned about the plight of third world women and the spread of HIV in the United States, she sought to guard against a moralistic interpretation of data. The second author, having previously worked in the field of addictions, had to guard against seeing various behaviors and attitudes as indicators of addiction or psychopathology. Also, a close friend of the second author has engaged in sex tourism, and his identification with this friend might have clouded his judgment. The authors addressed this issue throughout the data analysis process through dialoging about the codes and categories that were found. We worked at looking for contradictory evidence to themes and categories, and challenged each other to look for alternative explanations of data.

## **Design**

This article presents the findings of an exploratory, qualitative study using content analysis to observe common themes and patterns of sex tour websites. Through systematic observation of available sex tour websites, researchers uncovered themes represented on sex tour sites. Inductively, researchers explored the text of sex tour websites looking for common categories. These categories were systematically coded and then analyzed to elucidate common themes and patterns. Both authors served as coders to examine these themes to ensure inter-coder reliability (Neuman, 1997). As stated, once themes and patterns were established and labeled, researchers began culling data for the presence or variances of these themes, again to ensure maximum validity and reliability. In consistently reevaluating, redefining, and openly exploring the website material, researchers built theory by making comparisons, thus establishing the themes that are presented in the findings (Neuman, 1997). In order to ensure trustworthiness of data, disagreements in data analysis were dealt with carefully. Conflicts in interpretation were identified and placed to the side for a period of time. After a period of “cooling off,” the researchers reevaluated data after having carefully explored our personal biases and issues related to the subject.

The sample for this study included 20 sex tour websites used as texts for data analysis. The study employed five major search engines to conduct a comprehensive search, reviewing websites containing information on “sex tours” and “sex tourism.” These search engines included: Yahoo, AltaVista, Ilor, Magellan, and Lycos. As different search engines utilize different search criteria and methodology, utilizing various engines is a comprehensive search, and is especially important when research involve cross-cultural or transnational issues (Zahir, Dobing, & Hunter, 2002). Utilizing each of these search engines helped ensure that most available sites would be found. Upon running a search and locating sites, each website was printed and logged. Due to the vast number of sites and expected similarities among sites, data collection concluded when researchers achieved data saturation. The information on each website was individually analyzed, and then its themes were compared with those of other sites until saturation was reached.

Through content analysis, each sex tour website was thoroughly reviewed and topics and categories were separated and labeled. The analysis included two initial anticipated themes: the portrayal of male tourists and information referring to male tourists’ insecurities. The authors attempted to remain open to the emergence of new themes as they arose in data analysis. Using a method of constant comparative analysis, researchers coded data, reviewed codes, recoded data into new categories, and continued in a process until clear, specific themes became apparent

(Padgett, 1998). Common themes and patterns were collected and compared with data from other websites. The second author reviewed the emergence of themes in order to ensure inter-coder reliability and reduce researcher bias. The final study results include qualitative data describing emerging themes and their implications.

## **Findings**

The findings presented below have been categorized according to themes and sub-themes that emerged during the data collection phase of this study. While the authors recognize that the very act of coding serves as a means of data analysis, to the degree possible, data is presented without analysis during this section. Analysis and implications will be provided in the following sections of this article.

### **Depiction of Male Consumer**

While exploring sex tourism, several themes concerning characteristics of consumers emerged. Sex tours are marketed towards men with certain characteristics. The advertisement of sex tours primarily through the Internet, and the high cost of sex tour participation reveal sex tour consumers to be heterosexual males, with moderate education, and middle to upper class status.

Three roles emerged as themes in the depiction of male tourists: the male tourist as being on a sexual conquest; seeking companionship; and as hardworking and unappreciated.

#### *Male consumer as sexual conquistador*

Common among approximately one-half of sex tour websites reviewed was a theme describing American men as having intense, adventurous sexual needs. One site states, "Bangkok continues to satisfy the ever increasing sexual appetites of the men seeking to satisfy their ongoing pursuit for sexual pleasure" (<http://www.Exoticatravel.com>)\*. These sexual endeavors are often described as wild, with many different women, and with more than one woman at once. These descriptions imply that men have strong sexual desires and fantasies, and that these fantasies are often unfulfilled in their everyday lives. Sexual tours offer the kind of experience every man wants but very few can have.

#### *Male consumer as companion seeker*

Other websites depict the male consumer as more seriously pursuing a relationship with a foreign woman. This theme varies in the types of relationships the male consumer may be pursuing, from those looking for a wife or marriage to those seeking romance. For example, one site describes the male consumer as seeking a companion without emphasizing romantic love or connection,

---

\* A number of websites used in data collection were no longer in operation at time of publication. These specific websites are noted in the Reference section at the conclusion of this paper.



Perhaps you just want to get down to business. Find the right woman, know it will work where it has to work for a man (in bed and in the home), and get on with your lives together without wasting months or years playing expensive, frustrating, western woman games. (<http://www.Lovetours.com>, 2001)

However, other websites depict a more sincere, sensitive man, who is seeking love, “Your sense of adventure and a desire for deeper, more meaningful communication has brought you to our marriage agency to find these Russian women, and it is our goal to assist you in your quest for love” (<http://www.Exoticlady.net>, 2001). These sites offer men the chance to meet the women of their dreams and lead the caring, commitment-seeking men to believe that finding their soul mates is easier on foreign land.

### *Male consumer as overworked and unappreciated*

An overlapping theme emerged in data depicting the male consumer as deserving of a break from the hassles of his everyday life. “There comes a time in life when one should reap the benefits of hard work and sacrifice, and take time to enjoy the pleasures so richly deserved” (<http://www.Ladyparadise.com>, 2001). This theme depicts men as hard working but neglected of the rewards of their labor. These comments imply that the hardworking successful man may not have the time to pursue women as he wishes. The consumer needs to give himself a break in order to enjoy women. Women are rewards or trophies for men’s hard work.

Overall, these depictions show that male consumers are looking for a variety of experiences on sex tours. Many are looking for a break from the reality of hard work and their lack of opportunities with women. Others are seeking sex that is compulsive, anonymous, and easy to procure. Finally, some men are seeking companionship and romantic relationships in an environment they hope to find open and accepting toward them.

### **Men’s Insecurities**

Sex tour websites depict men as having personal insecurities, fears, and anxieties about themselves, their abilities, and their desirability. Several sub-themes emerged from data focusing on men’s insecurities (See Table 1). Men’s fears and deficiencies are acknowledged but presented as preventable, as participation in a sex tour creates the potential for men to be who they have always wanted to be.

### **Personal Inadequacies**

#### **Flaws**

The first sub-theme uncovered from website text, as depicted in Table 1, is men’s undesirability based on a number of personal flaws. Sites show men questioning whether or not sex tours will work for them due to their age, physical appearance, marital status, capacity for sexual functioning, and even penis size. These statements imply that men, who might consider participating in tours struggle with these flaws and that these flaws prevent them from having successful encounters with women in their everyday lives. [Latin-loveconnection.com](http://Latin-loveconnection.com) depicts

men asking questions such as, “I’m divorced. Is that a problem?” and “Is age an important factor?”

The response of the sex tour agency to these personal insecurities is, “It is rarely a quality by which women will judge you” and “In most cases, your looks are not important. Many of these women prefer older men, who may be double their age. Latin women appreciate personal qualities such as sensitivity, faithfulness, and sincerity” (<http://Latin-loveconnection.com>, 2001).

The message is that, to these foreign women, men’s flaws do not matter, and they should not be judged. Other sites go on to assure men, “We know where he can find a woman who can love him for what he is from day one...Wealthy or poor, ugly or attractive, western men are often seen as good potential husbands to be loved and honored for a lifetime” (<http://www.Lovetours.com>, 2001). Tour sites demonstrate that, while participating in a tour, one’s flaws will not be a concern for foreign women. Chosen attributes, such as sincerity and kindness, are used to explain what foreign women are looking for and why they do not care about men’s personal flaws.

Sites go beyond stating that men will not be judged to include the notion that men will resolve their problems or insecurities by being accepted for who they really are.

Table 1.

| Currently you are:  | On your tour you will:  |
|---|---|
| 1. Flawed: Divorced, age, physical appearance, sexual dysfunction | 1. Finally be accepted regardless of flaws                                  |
| 2. Not special  | 2. Treated like a king, center of attention                                 |
| 3. Rejected   | 3. Not rejected, wanted by women  |
| 4. Unable to compete with other men                               | 4. Admired by other men and able to gain male acceptance and companionship. |
| 5. Bad lover  | 5. Able to please women   |

### **Not Special**

The second insecurity sub-theme drawn from the data is that many prospective consumers may believe they are ordinary or not special. “In my hometown, I’m just a regular guy, but when I was in Manila, I was the center of attention” (<http://www.Ladyparadise.com>, 2001). The sites point out that sex tours will match consumers with women, who make them feel special, unique and valued, feelings they usually do not experience. “You will discover, once you get down to business that she is openly glad to be with you, that she will treat you like a king” (<http://www.Lovetours.com>, 2001). Men, who are afraid that they are not special, or who have had trouble gaining acceptance, can expect to be treated in the way they deserve while on foreign land.

### **Expect Rejection**

Tied strongly to the two themes above is the sub-theme that prospective consumers are accustomed to being rejected by women. Whether because they have flaws, have nothing to offer, or are boring, as the themes above suggest, men experience continual rejection by women.

How much time, and how much emotional and financial strain will it take you to convince ten or twelve attractive women to sleep with you so that you can find someone who will keep you from wanting more? Then what are the chances that this woman will want to marry you? What are the changes you could trust her once you are married? (<http://www.Lovetours.com>, 2001)

This quote demonstrates the expected rejection many consumers are presumed to feel when approaching women for sex and relationships in their everyday lives.

The sites again show that foreign women are looking for simple characteristics that are probably possessed by consumers. It is also presumed that once these traits are recognized, male tourists will not be rejected. “Within the bar, if you’re kind, if you’re polite, if you’re smart; most any girl is available” (<http://www.Lovetours.com>, 2001). This implies that manners are the prerequisite to being accepted by a woman whereas, in everyday life, pursuing women has been a complicated game filled with disappointment and rejection.

### **Relationships with Other Men**

Several sites make reference to the consumer’s experience in relation to other men. Sites imply that prospective consumers may deal with competing for women with other western men, that they often lose this competition, and that they may be jealous of those men that are better competitors. The following site explicitly boosts consumers’ beliefs that they will be able to compete in a foreign country and, taking it a step further, that other men will admire them for their successes.

You won’t have to look at another man with a beautiful woman sitting at a bar, walking through the hotel lobby, going into his room, dining in a restaurant or sitting in a disco and wonder why you can’t be with the gorgeous woman like that man. On a Bendrick's Private Companion Vacation you can, because you are that man. You are the envy of all the guys, who thought they could do it on their own and didn’t. (<http://www.Bendricks.com>, 2001)

The tour websites go beyond assuring the consumer that he will be able to compete with other men for women’s affection, but also show the consumer that he can bond with other men while enjoying the sex tour. The ability to compete for women creates the respect necessary to make friends or connect with other men. Several sites make mention of enjoying women while in the company of “like-minded men”; one site emphasizes, “It’s like going to an eight day party with great, similarly thinking friends” (<http://www.Videotravel.com>, 2001).

### **Bad Lover**

The final sub-theme of men’s personal insecurities is men’s concerns about their sexual abilities. Sites depict men having concerns about their abilities to perform well sexually. The sites offer sex tours as a way to meet women, who are easily excited and easily satisfied sexually with minimal effort or talent. “Before I even touched between her legs she was ...horny. And, trust me, I am no Tom Cruise” (<http://www.Lovetours.com>, 2001).

Consumer testimonials suggest disbelief that they were able to have sex with the caliber of women on the tour, and that these women were truly excited, pleased, and beyond satisfied with the sexual encounter. The message appears to be that, historically, western men have had trouble pleasing women. However, they truly possess the power to be a good lover, but they were merely in the wrong place with the wrong women. Therefore, sex tours are the answer to a man's fears about his performance in bed.

### **Male Consumers' Lives**

Beyond personal flaws, sex tour websites send male consumers several messages about their current lifestyles and their vulnerability.

#### **Loneliness**

The loneliness of the male consumer is a theme that presents itself more frequently than any other theme implied by sex tour websites. Many sites make mention of the male consumer as a lonely person, who can't seem to connect, either physically or emotionally, to anyone. For example,

If you enjoy vacations but are tired of taking vacations alone in the hopes of meeting a beautiful woman who will spend some time with you; if you don't want to spend any more holidays alone, or simply just want to enjoy the company of friendly beautiful women... (<http://www.Bendricks.com>, 2001)

Sex tour sites acknowledge the fact that many men are lonely, are seeking connection with others, and are having trouble finding this connection. At the same time, by offering an option to relieve this loneliness, sex tour advertisements imply that the male simply has been in the wrong environment; sex tours offer the opportunity for a context in which not to feel alone.

#### **Boring Lives**

Related to loneliness, several sites point to the lack of excitement in prospective consumers' lives. For example one site states,

Your girlfriend or wife has left you, your boyfriend, husband or spouse has left you, you are single and bored, you're married and bored, it doesn't really matter, we can change all of that. It is now time to start living again and having some fun. We promise you that you will have more fun, more often on this vacation than you can imagine. (<http://www.Exoticatravel.com>, 2001)

The sites paint a picture of loneliness and boredom that could create a sense of desperation and depression in the male consumer, who experiences loneliness. Sex tours are provided as the solution to this dissatisfaction with one's life. Once again, the boring lifestyle projected onto prospective consumers is not assumed to be due to an innate flaw, and is beyond one's responsibility. The alternative to living a boring life is a sex tour, which is exemplified by one

consumer when he writes, "Thank you for putting new life back into me!" (<http://www.Videotravel.com>, 2001).

### **Vulnerability**

Agencies go beyond the idea that male consumers are lonely and have no lives, but also play on male consumers' fears that others will take advantage of them. Whether taken advantage of by foreign women, the foreign country or the tour agency itself, the theme is that men are worried about being manipulated. Sex tour websites address this fear of vulnerability in two ways, by reassuring prospective consumers of the agency's ability to take care of the consumer and prevent harm, and by assuring the consumer about foreign women's natural kindness and innocence.

In relation to women, the sites portray several fears involving women taking advantage of male consumers through using them for their own benefit. For example, one site displays a question from a prospective consumer, "Are these women really interested in me or just looking for a free ride?" (<http://www.Latin-loveconnection.com>, 2001). This quote points to the man's insecurity in believing the woman actually wants him for who he is. It also shows his conflict in paying money to a woman, at the same time attempting to believe that she is interested in him as a human being. The agency replies, "These women are not looking to escape their countries since many of them are professionals or have good jobs. They want a man, who will treat them with dignity, love, and respect, sometimes very difficult for her to find in her own country" (<http://www.Latin-loveconnection.com>).

Other concerns and fears depicted on sites are related to the possibility of being taken advantage of financially by women back home. For example, "My last wife took me to the cleaners when I got divorced. I don't want to have it happen again" (<http://www.Lovetours.com>, 2001). Other fears depict men worrying that they will bring women back to the United States, and they will disappear upon arrival. Again, men are reassured that the foreign women are looking to be with men, who will treat them right and provide for them. Foreign women's natural loyalty is contrasted with a portrayal of greedy, manipulative, western women. It assures the consumer of his safety and fulfillment in pursuing foreign companions.

### **Discussion**

Findings will be discussed as they related to each major theme. Connections between themes will be made. Additionally, some beginning discussion of theoretical and practice issues that immerge from the data will be explored.

### **Description of Male Tourist**

As stated previously, findings show that men are depicted through three main sub-themes: being on a sexual conquest, seeking a romantic partner, and being overworked and unappreciated at home. A closer discussion of these themes points to the expectation that men fill certain sexual, relational, and work related roles in western culture.

Sex tour agencies send male consumers mixed messages about what they should desire, accomplish, and achieve. Men should have the desire to sleep with many anonymous women and should be proud of succeeding at this conquest. At the same time, a man should also find a

woman that he can call his own; the western male is expected to connect with a woman, who will be loyal and support him as his companion. These two contrasting roles can be confusing and contradictory. The cognitive dissonance that men may experience may be summarized in a question such as: How can one find a committed partnership and at the same time satisfy a man's natural instinct to sleep with numerous women? Once a partnership is established, can a man continue to satisfy these male instincts to have anonymous sex with other women? The contrasting themes of what roles men should play in relation to women may be one that is commonly experienced by the western male. The findings depict men's common social dilemma in finding a partner, girlfriend, or wife, while also being encouraged to sexually experience many women.

A possible consequence of these messages is an increased acceptance in male adultery. Sleeping with women, whether foreign or domestic, outside of a partnership or marriage could be supported by the themes presented on tour agency websites. The male adulterer wants a significant relationship, but he also contends with an innate need to have sex with multiple women. Thus, male adultery is reinforced by sex tour agencies' messages that sex is a natural, almost biological, need of males. While no causation or direct impact is evident through this study, it is important to acknowledge the common themes between sex tour agency messages of how men should be and the western trends for men's social roles.

Tour agency websites also promote the sense that men deserve the sexual experiences offered on tours because they work so hard at home without the recognition they deserve. In this sense, sex with foreign women is established as a reward for western men's hard work in their jobs, something western women and others at home neglect to give to hard working western men. This message can be troublesome if it instills feelings of entitlement in the male consumer. Men can expect to be treated like kings, to be pampered, and to have all of their sexual needs met because they are owed these actions from others. Men's sense of entitlement could lead them to experience conflicts with women, who do not feel men are owed sexual favors for their hard work. This entitlement is similar to justifications given by men accused of nonconsensual sex. The themes represented on sex tour websites can have implications for western men's abilities to relate to women, form relationships, be respectful sexually, and understand their roles in relation to the other gender.

### **Male Tourists' Insecurities**

Several insecurities are pointed out by sex tour websites. Across these themes is the implication that the male consumer still has certain core attributes that are truly attractive to others. Such core attributes include being kind, polite, and sincere towards women. The implication is that a man, who may be worried about his value as a prospective date, husband, or lover, can be comforted by the fact that he actually has attributes that will be attractive to foreign women. Thus, the message is that men's flaws may be a reality for the male consumer, but they will not get in his way while on a foreign sex tour because he will be appreciated for his innate qualities or true self.

One possible consequence is that this message can perpetuate men's insecurities, as men believe that while at home attempting to interact with females, their flaws still exist. Sex tours establish the fact that the only way "for a man like you" to successfully connect with a woman is to travel to a foreign country and pay for sex. This message can be discouraging, depressing, and socially inhibiting. Additionally, the message that men's inadequacies will inevitably cause them

relationship problems in the United States may prevent men with difficulties from seeking help with these issues.

Secondly, tour websites establish a false sense of acceptance by foreign women that encourages men to conclude that foreign women are interested in them, when realistically, they may be interested in only the consumer's money. Male consumers' expectations to romantically connect with foreign women may be unfulfilled leading to disappointment or disillusionment. Furthermore, should the male consumer believe the false premise that he is connecting with a foreign woman; he may be set up for further disappointment as he returns home expecting the same treatment from western females.

Although the sites make very few references to the fact that male consumers are finding sex and connections with women through paying for services, the cognitive dissonance male consumers may be feeling is explicitly countered in some site texts. Some site agencies comment that all men visit brothels in the foreign country being visited. Furthermore, site agencies convince the western male that visiting a prostitute is not hidden or shamed in this foreign land. The message is that paying for sex is normal and common among men, and there is nothing to hide or be ashamed of. This reassurance is important to point out as male consumers are combating social and cultural moral values through participating in such a taboo phenomenon as erotic tourism.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Several key limitations of this study should be addressed. First, this study did not collect data directly from men, who have participated in sex tourism. It instead sought to look at the advertising of websites of sex tours. It is uncertain to what degree the actual perceptions of men would correlate with the findings of this study. It could be that the proprietary nature of the data analyzed would lead to significant bias. Also, direct interviews with men, who engage in sex tourism, would allow for both a degree of depth and a means of feedback that was not possible in this study. Interviewing actual participants would have allowed the researchers to check their analysis with these key informants for improved validity.

The second limitation is related to the first. By only choosing one means of data collection, the degree to which the data is trustworthy is up for debate. Other sources of data, such as text written by female sex workers or direct interviews with this population, would be valuable.

### **Methodological Considerations and Ethical Issues**

Studying sex tourism presents many methodological conundrums for researchers. Direct access to men, who engage in sex tourism, may be problematic. Sex tourists clearly have reasons for not wanting to be studied. They are engaging in behavior that is sometimes illegal, and often considered taboo. Studying them in the natural environment where they engage in sex tourism may prove difficult and potentially risky. What stance should a researcher take in studying such a population? In this study, a distant, detached perspective of the anonymous observer was taken. Such a stance is often observed in qualitative research, but to what degree such studies are ethical is up for debate. As a participant observer, the researcher would be placing themselves in potentially risky and volatile situations.

The authors of this study would very much like to study sex tourism in a more direct manner. We have thought that perhaps direct interviews with men staying at hotels typically used for sex tourism might be valuable. An open, honest approach with willing participants might lead to in-depth, reliable data. However, it is likely that many potential subjects would be unwilling to participate, thus decreasing generalizability, but such a study would lend valuable insight into this fascinating issue.

### Conclusion

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected through the Internet and the growing global economy, sex tourism may become an even more significant phenomenon. Current literature studying sexual addiction describes sexual behaviors, compulsions, and obsessions that closely match some of the sexual behaviors described on sex tour websites. The types of sexual behaviors discovered in this study indicate the possible use of sex tourism to feed sexual addiction.

In light of research showing that men are less inhibited while traveling, and the present study's findings that men are having anonymous sexual experiences, possible health risks may be increased. Decreased inhibitions, combined with consumption of alcohol and an adventurous attitude toward sex, may create an increased rate of unprotected sex and thus increased risk for STDs. Sex tour advertisements stress the importance of being adventurous and experiencing sex like never before; these encouragements could increase the likelihood that consumers are reckless when it comes to not using protection during sex. Considering current literature pointing to the already increased risk of contracting HIV/AIDS for prostitutes and their customers, sex tourism appears to add multiple layers of risk.

Data from the present study also support the idea that foreign women are not the only one's being exploited by the sex tour industry. Data depicting men as looking for love, romance, and emotional connections with foreign women show that some men are under the impression they may find satisfying emotional connections with women when they realistically are participating in prostitution.

The present study serves to explore sex tourism, a topic that is scarcely studied. Helping professionals, academics, and public interests internationally can benefit from further research in this area. Future research should focus on gaining more detailed accounts of erotic tourism by contacting those participating, a population that is difficult to reach and rarely studied. Studies should focus on interviewing male sex tourists to explore their self-image, self-confidence, ability to form relationships, health concerns, and social consequences experienced due to participation in sex tourism. Goals of future research should include identifying why men are participating in sex tourism, what underlying unmet needs are being met by participation, and ways to make the industry safer for those who continue to participate.

### References

- Abu-Nasr, D. (1998, March). *Sex Tour' Industry Growing in U.S.* The Associated Press. Retrieved January 15, 2002, from <http://www.aegis.com>.
- Adams, R. (1987). The role of prostitution in AIDS and other STD's. *Medical Aspects of Human Sexuality*, 21(8), 27-33.



- An Exotic Lady Tours. (n.d). *Homepage*. Retrieved on December 20, 2001, from <http://www.exoticlady.net>.
- Augustine Fellowship Staff. (1986). *Sex and love addicts anonymous*. Norwood, MA: Augustine Fellowship.
- Bishop, R., & Robinson, L. (1999). In the night market: Tourism, sex, and commerce in contemporary Thailand. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 1, 33-45.
- Bendrick's Men's International Men's Club, (n.d.). *Homepage*. Retrieved December 12, 2001, from <http://www.Bendricks.com>.
- Bloor, M., Thomas, M., Abeni, D., Goujon, C., Hausser, D., Hubert, M., Kleiber, D., & Nieto, J. (2000). Sexual risk behaviour in a sample of 5676 young, unaccompanied travelers. In S. Clift, & S. Carter (Eds.), *Tourism and sex: Culture, commerce and coercion*. (pp.197-234). New York: Pinter.
- Canopic, W. P., & Oei, T. P. S. (1988).The interruption in the maintenance of compulsive sexual disorder: Two case studies. *The Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 17(5), 411-419.
- Carnes, P. (1983). *Out of the shadows*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: CompCare Publishers.
- Centers for Disease Control. (2001). *Divisions of HIV/AIDS Prevention: Basic Statistics-International Statistics*. Retrieved on April 15, 2001, from <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pubs/facts.htm>.
- Chutikul, S. (n.d.). *Who are the clients: The exploiters?* Retrieved on January 15, 2002, from <http://www.cwa.tnet.co.th/Vol12-1&2/Saisuree.htm>.
- Cohen, E. (1986). Love farangs: The correspondence between foreign men and Thai girls. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 59, 115-127.
- Constas, M. A. (1992). Qualitative analysis as a public event: The documentation of category development procedures. *American Educational Research Journal*, 29 (2), 253-266.
- Cooper, A., Putnam, D., Planchon, L., & Boies, S. (1999). Online sexual compulsivity: Getting tangled in the Net. *Sexual addiction and compulsivity*, 6, 79-104.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Earle, R., & Crow, G. (1989). *Lonely all the time*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Evans, R., Forsyth, C., & Wooddell, G. (2000). Macro and micro views of erotic tourism. *Deviant Behavior*, 21, 537-550.
- Gunther, A. (1998). Sex tourism without sex tourists. In M. Oppermann (Ed.), *Sex tourism and prostitution: Aspects of leisure, recreation, and work*. (pp. 121-136). New York: Cognizant Communication Corporation.
- Lady Paradise Tours. (n.d.). *Homepage*. Retrieved on December 20, 2001, from <http://www.Ladyparadise.com>.
- Latin Love Connection. (n.d.). *Homepage*. Retrieved on December 5, 2001, from <http://www.Latin-loveconnection.com>.
- Love Tours. (n.d.). *Homepage*. Retrieved on December 5, 2001, from <http://www.Lovetours.net>. Site no longer in operation on the World Wide Web.
- Neuman, W. (1997). *Social research methods*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Padgett, D. (1998). *Qualitative methods in social work research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Patton, M. Q. (2001). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Raviv, M. (1993). Personality characteristics of sexual addicts and pathological gamblers. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 9(1), 17-30.

- Safyer, A., & Spies, K. (1988). The biology of AIDS. *Health and Social Work, 13*(4), 251-258.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Thomas, M. (2000). Exploring the contexts and meanings of women's experiences of sexual intercourse on holiday. In S. Clift, & S. Carter (Eds.), *Tourism and sex: Culture, commerce and coercion* (pp. 45-66). New York: Pinter.
- UNAIDS Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS. (2001). AIDS epidemic update. Retrieved on May 15, 2002, from <http://www.avert.org/worldstats.htm>.
- Video Travel. (n.d.). *Homepage*. Retrieved on December 3, 2001, from <http://www.videotravel.com>. Site no longer in operation on the World Wide Web.
- Wolfe, J. (2000). Assessment and treatment of compulsive sex/love behavior. *Journal of Rational-Emotive & Cognitive Behavior Therapy, 18*(4), 235-246.
- Zahir, S., Dobing, B., & Hunter, M. G. (2002). Cross cultural dimensions of Internet portals. *Internet Research: Electronic Networking Applications and Policy, 12*(3), 210-220.

### Author Note

Kimberly Bender, MSW is currently working as an outpatient therapist in a community mental health center in Northern Virginia. She has published articles in the Journal of Sociology of Social Welfare, Advances in Social Work, and Sincronia. She holds special interest in the areas of international social work and gender related issues and values ongoing research in these areas. Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Ms. Kim Bender at [kimannbender@hotmail.com](mailto:kimannbender@hotmail.com).

Rich Furman, MSW, Ph.D. is an assistant professor in the School of Social Work at the University of Nebraska-Omaha. His scholarship is concerned with varied topics including: the nature of friendship and its relationship to psychosocial health; the uses of poetry in social work research, education and practice; international social welfare; social work ethics; and the relationship between social work theory and practice. Rich Furman, MSW, PhD is Assistant Professor at the School of Social Work, University of Nebraska-Omaha, Annex 40, 60<sup>th</sup> and Dodge Streets, Omaha, Nebraska 68182-0293; E-mail: [Rfurman@mail.unomaha.edu](mailto:Rfurman@mail.unomaha.edu).

Copyright 2004: Kimberly Bender, Rich Furman, and Nova Southeastern University

### Author's Citation

Bender, K., & Furman, R. (2004). The implications of sex tourism on men's social, psychological, and physical health. *The Qualitative Report, 9*(2), 176-191. Retrieved [Insert date], from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR9-2/bender.pdf>