Why Do Men Buy Sex? (Preview)

Some researchers say Johns seek intimacy on demand; others believe these men typically want to use and dominate women.

By Nikolas Westerhoff

Key Concepts

 }// In the U.S., police officers detained about 78,000 people in 2007 for prostitution-related crimes, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Only about 10 percent of these arrests are of the sex patrons, who almost exclusively are men.

A considerable proportion of men worldwide buy sex from female prostitutes, with most estimates of lifetime prevalence ranging from 7 to 39 percent, depending on the country and study. Many experts argue that it is a male appetite—and not the choices of prostitutes—that fundamentally drives the sex trade.

Men’s motives for buying sex are hotly contested among researchers. Some believe the practice serves as a salve for common psychological afflictions, such as an unfulfilled craving for sex or romance. Others, meanwhile, paint a dimmer portrait of Johns, believing they are driven by chauvinistic motives, such as a desire to dominate and control women.

Arthur is an alleged John, a man who patronizes prostitutes. After his arrest on September 5, 2008, a photograph of this 41-year-old appeared on the Web site of the Chicago Police Department. Arthur (not his real name) was far from the only person so branded on this Internet portal. Samuel, 59, and José, 34, (whose names were also changed to protect their privacy) were on this online pillory for a month after their September 5 arrests.

The apprehensions of Arthur, Samuel, José and many others represent the huge demand among males for prostitutes. In the U.S., police officers detained about 78,000 people in 2007 for prostitution-related crimes, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Experts believe that about 10 percent of these arrests are of the sex patrons, almost all of whom are men.

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