

**Let's Go for a Walk:
Sexual Decision-making among Clients of
Female Entertainment Workers
in Phnom Penh, Cambodia**

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ABSTRACT

This article describes group socializing and sex-seeking practices among high-risk men in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Via purposive and snowball sampling, 48 men aged 21-35 were selected by the study researchers to be interviewed. All participants were interviewed twice, 12 of them in one-on-one interviews, and 36 in small group discussions. Narrative interviewing techniques were used to elicit stories of recent instances of group socializing and transactional sex.

Men in the study described drinking heavily and seeking sex in groups as a normal part of socializing with their friends. Strong group pressure is seen by many men as preventing them from acting on their own will to sometimes opt out of transactional sex. Most men feel they face their social group alone, and appear to be unaware that a desire to sometimes opt out of sex is common among men.

Strongly dissonant strands exist within Khmer masculinity. One strand, *pleasure-indulgent masculinity*, rewards maximum commitment to the social group, which is demonstrated through socializing, heavy drinking of alcohol, and seeking commercial sex. Another strand, *self-restraint masculinity*, derives from traditions of filial piety, controlling one's urges, and social harmony. In an attempt to mediate the conflict between private desires to opt out and the need to maintain group cohesion, men concoct stories that allow them to leave the group without causing a confrontation over group solidarity. Their reluctance to discuss moral and reputational concerns with their friends solidifies the divide between the two notions of masculinity. However, if more men engaged in conversations in which their private thoughts were publicly recognized and validated, this would likely diminish their need to lie and make excuses to their social group when they choose not to seek sex.

INTRODUCTION

Cambodia represents a great success story in combating the HIV/AIDS epidemic, as it successfully lowered the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate from 3.1% in 1997 to the current estimate of 0.9% (NCHADS, 2007). The 100% Condom Use Program (100% CUP) played a major role in this reduction, largely by targeting groups considered at the greatest risk of contracting HIV, such as female brothel-based entertainment workers, military personnel, truckers, and policemen.

Despite these efforts, prevalence among female entertainment workers in Cambodia has remained elevated; as of 2003, the prevalence rate among female commercial sex workers (CSWs) was 21% in urban areas and 31% in rural areas of the country. One study found that half of the direct female CSWs sampled were HIV-positive (Oshige, et al., 2000; Wong, et al., 2003).

In addition to being a serious health concern for CSWs, the high HIV prevalence poses a risk to Cambodian men who frequent female sex workers. Studies suggest that a large number of Cambodian men engage in commercial sex. A study of youth in Cambodia found that more than a quarter of males' first sexual partner was a female CSW, and 65% of those reporting a sexual partner reported a CSW partner (Douthwaite & Sareoun, 2006). PSI's 2006 targeted behavioral survey among sexually active men with sweethearts,¹ in Phnom Penh, aged 18-40, found that more than half of these men reported having sex with a paid partner in the preceding 12 months with brothel-based partners (53%; mean of 7.9 partners), with approximately 40% reporting three or more commercial partners in the preceding 12 months (PSI/Cambodia, 2006).

PSI and other organizations working to reduce HIV transmission in Cambodia have consequently shifted their prevention strategies to focus on high-risk populations, including, notably, female entertainment workers. However, in the quest to reach entertainment workers, the risks and experiences of male clients have been under-studied, and fewer prevention messages thus effectively target this at-risk population.

¹ Sweetheart (*songsar*) relationships are defined as noncommercial, nonmarital sexual relationships that possess a certain degree of affection and trust on the part of at least one partner. As commercial sex in Cambodia has increasingly migrated out of brothels, sexual relationships that may have begun as strictly commercial and may continue to contain a commercial aspect frequently develop into ongoing sexual relationships that involve some affection. Sweetheart relationships are now a distinct cultural and linguistic partner category (see PSI/Cambodia 2002).

This study was designed to investigate the group socializing and sex-seeking practices of male clients of entertainment workers so that messaging could be developed to reach them where they gather, and in a manner that would resonate with them. There were four principal study objectives: 1) to explore the sexual decision-making processes of men who regularly patronize venues where high-risk behavior is common; 2) to identify key behavior patterns and social inducements that lead some men to frequently have sex with entertainment workers; 3) to locate decisive junctures in the course of men's socializing when a decision to *not* seek the services of an entertainment worker could be made; and 4) to produce a series of personalized archetypes (composite characters; see Appendix A) that could be used by programmers to frame behavior change messaging for entertainment establishment-based HIV-prevention interventions aimed at both fostering partner reduction and increasing condom use among at-risk men.

LITERATURE REVIEW

HIV/AIDS and Commercial Sex

The high rates of HIV among CSWs reflect high levels of sexual risk behaviors. Studies of female sex workers in Cambodia found varying rates of consistent condom use, from 11% among non-brothel-based CSWs to 78% for brothel-based CSWs (Oshige, et al., 2000; Wong, et al., 2003). Among CSWs, the most frequently cited reason for not using a condom with a commercial partner was “not being able to persuade them.” Rates of consistent condom use were much lower with non-paying sexual partners, with only 20% of CSWs reporting consistently using a condom with a sweetheart (Wong, et al., 2003). Among women working in entertainment venues, transactional sex is also common. A majority reported having exchanged sex for money (62.3% in 2006), according to findings from PSI's 2006 targeted behavioral survey of women working in karaoke establishments in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap (PSI/Cambodia, 2006).

A 2005 study of male clients of CSWs indicated that while there was a high level of knowledge of HIV and condom use (75% report always having used a condom, and 95% reported used a condom in their last sexual act), there was also a high prevalence of HIV, at 9% of male clients. The study additionally found that 40% of these clients had non-commercial partners, and that condom use was much lower with these partners – 34% of male clients reported using a condom in their last non-commercial sexual act, but only 14% reported consistently using condoms with said partners (Kim,

et al., 2005). This suggests that male clients of CSWs may serve as a bridging population in the HIV epidemic, transmitting the virus from a high prevalence group (CSWs) to the general population (their non-commercial partners).

Men's Sexual Decision-making

The high-risk behaviors of CSWs and their male clients and correspondingly high prevalence of HIV indicate a need to target intervention strategies to male clients in order to reduce the transmission of HIV. To effectively target interventions to this population, it is critical to understand male sexual decision-making and the factors that motivate men to engage in high-risk commercial and non-commercial sexual behaviors.

The limited number of studies that have addressed men's sexual decision-making in Southeast Asia suggest that the role of peer groups is critical. VanLandingham et al (1998), citing Laumann and Gagnon (1995), use networking theory, expanded from its US-based dyadic origins, to highlight the role that third-party 'stakeholders' have in patterns of sex seeking. In the case of Thai men, the dynamics of male homosocial² groups, often men's most intimate social relationships, were found to be more important to understanding the sexual decision-making of men than were the relationships with their sex partners. The potential for sexual decision-making to affirm or disrupt men's friendship networks raises the stakes in each instance of decision-making, as the decision is not simply whether or not sex occurs but whether or not individuals' ties to the group and the groups integrity get reinforced or undermined.

VanLandingham's study of Thai men found that group dynamics encouraged commercial sex by providing the opportunities to engage in it, by promoting heavy drinking, and by pressuring ambivalent members to participate (VanLandingham, et al., 1998). A study of Cambodian youth corroborated the importance of peer groups in influencing sexual behaviors, finding that commercial sex most often occurred in the company of other males (76% of transactional sex instances happened with a group). This study also indicated that peer groups may influence risk behaviors

² Homosociality refers to a preference for socializing with people of the same gender in an intimate but not sexual fashion. In sexually charged situations such as the ones described in this study, there may occur a displacement of desire whereby the object of the sexual gaze (a woman) is different from the outcome of desired intimacy (a group of men). In this setting homosocial relations reinforce normative heterosexuality while fostering close bonds among men. See, for example, Sedgwick 1985.

positively, as those who engaged in commercial or transactional sex with a peer group more frequently reported using a condom than those who did so alone (92% vs. 58%) (Douthwaite & Sarcoun, 2006). The authors suggested that this higher rate of condom use may be due to peer pressure to conform to the 100% condom use campaign, but the authors indicated that more research is needed to explore how group dynamics affect condom use.

Also contributing to sexual decision-making among men is the normalization of commercial sex. Among Thai men, commercial sexual activity is often viewed as a form of entertainment with little associated stigma (VanLandingham, et al., 1998), and a study of Cambodian men found that commercial sex after marriage was viewed as a form of male entertainment, and was considered acceptable when among a group of men (Gorbach, et al., 2000).

Another driver of higher risk sexual encounters is level of integration with socio-cultural norms of the broader community. Gorbach et al.'s study of Cambodian men's sexual risk behavior (2000) found that men who were most removed from the community norms were more likely to engage in higher risk sexual encounters. Men at particular risk are military men, police, and taxicab drivers, as they are often away from their homes and families and operate in situations where peer groups normalize commercial sex activity.

Expectations about gender roles and masculinity also appear to play a role in sexual decision-making. The aforementioned VanLandingham, et al., study (1998) of extramarital sexual relations among Thai men found that Thai cultural norms emphasized high male sexual drive and impulsiveness was considered a driver of commercial sex. A qualitative study of Cambodian men and women echoed this widespread belief of men having a high sexual drive that could not be satisfied by a spouse, requiring extramarital sex to satisfy their urges (Phan & Patterson, 1994).

These findings indicate that normalization of commercial sex as acceptable entertainment, pressure from peer groups to engage in outings that involve drinking and commercial sex, and disassociation from community and family norms are major factors in male sexual decision-making.

METHODS³

The recruitment of participants was undertaken through purposive sampling at establishments where men typically begin their evenings of socializing, including soup restaurants, palm wine stalls, and beer gardens, and snowball sampling via men contacted at these establishments. The entertainment establishment list was derived from a map of “hotspots” developed by PSI in 2006. Forty-eight men between 21 and 35 years of age were selected by the study researchers to interview. All but two of them said they had had sex with an entertainment worker within the preceding six months.⁴ Half were single; half married. Men were divided into higher- and lower-socioeconomic status (SES) categories based on their occupations, monthly incomes, education level, and impressionistic self-presentation factors such as clothing.⁵

Each man was scheduled to complete two interviews. The first interview was narrative in form, asking them to recount a typical evening of socializing that resulted in sex for at least one member of their group. The second interview covered influencers, the dynamics of opting in or out of commercial sex, and behaviors related to condom use. Twelve men were interviewed one-on-one and 36 participated in small group discussions comprised of three participants and one moderator each. Participants’ preference guided the decision whether to interview them in small groups or individually.

Small group discussions were selected in order to mimic the conversational dynamics of men’s social groups, which preliminary discussions among the research team indicated typically number four to five, and to allow each man to relate his unique stories. Additionally, the use of small groups

³ Ethical approval for this study was granted by the National Ethics Committee for Health Research, reference 013NECHR, on 14 February 2007.

⁴ There was some leeway given to recruiters to allot interview spaces to men who said they personally had not had sex with an entertainment worker or sex worker, but who said that members of their group had done so in the preceding six months. This was done for two reasons: 1) there was a concern among the research team that men would self-underreport in a brief screening conversation; 2) some men whose group-mates have sex with entertainment workers but who themselves refrain from commercial sex were viewed as potentially offering insight into the decision-making process. Both conjectures proved well-founded.

⁵ There was some confusion about how to categorize students, some of whom also work. Although initially divided into lower- and higher-SES categories based on reported monthly income, a decision was made to group them with the latter, while considering them a sub-group in their own right. The students in the study, regardless of reported income, socialize in relatively expensive, high-status locations. In addition, empirically, in terms of their habits and attitudes, the students in the study had less in common with motorcycle taxi drivers and cyclo (rickshaw) drivers, than with merchants and white-collar workers.

discussions was preferred to focus groups in order to reduce the desire for the group to seek consensus or to simply amplify dominant participants' contributions. The use of small groups also made group management easier for moderators.

Small group discussions fostered some of the group processes that traditional focus groups were designed to capture. Participants spoke about their personal experiences in front of people with whom they would not normally share such intimacies. The researchers, meanwhile, gained insight into topics that are uncommon for men to address outside their peer groups, and to the reactions of men to hearing the experiences of men similar to themselves.

The narrative interviewing method was chosen to produce rich, personalized accounts, which are essential to gaining insight into how individuals relate to groups and how decisions are made. In addition, by engaging participants in experiential storytelling, narrative interviewing was believed to be well-suited to creating realistic and precise archetypes because it enables participants to discuss what they know about their own lives, rather than trying to supply researchers with answers. Men who participated in the group discussions were recruited from disparate entertainment venues and did not know each other in advance of the interviews. All interviews with men were conducted by male PSI research staff.

All participants were promised confidentiality and assured that their names would never be connected to their words. To ensure this, only first names were collected during the recruiting phase. The audiotapes were destroyed at the conclusion of the data analysis phase of the study.

Data collection took place between February and April 2007. The interviews were audio-recorded and the translated transcripts were analyzed by the author using ATLAS.ti software and by the PSI research team using standard Microsoft Office applications. Analysis responsibilities were divided. The PSI research team carried out analysis with the goal of drafting archetypes. The author, with input from PSI and FHI, was responsible for the main findings, report drafting, and archetype oversight.

RESULTS

Khmer Masculinities

The study followed the approach to masculinity outlined by Connell (2005, 2000). Emphasizing the plural and hierarchical character of *masculinities* found within any given cultural setting, such an approach allows for different ways of performing masculinity. Connell stresses that some forms of masculinity will be more highly socially esteemed than others and that the gender system is never fixed over time. The form of masculinity that is dominant at a particular time and place is the hegemonic form, which needn't be the most numerically common. This form is highly influential on those who aspire to it as well as those who fall outside or reject it. Frequently, men who do not conform to the dominant form are subject to mockery, humiliation, demonization, and violence.⁶ In addition, hegemonic masculinity is dominant not just in relation to other forms of masculinity, but also in relation to the gender system as a whole.

Masculinity is both a set of ideals Cambodian men aspire to and also a living, evolving set of identities, practices and representations of men and boys. Where cultural conditions are in a state of flux—certainly the case in contemporary Phnom Penh—novel and established patterns of masculinity will compete for men's attention. This process impacts individual men at the level of decision-making. Over time, as men's individual decision-making practices shift to accommodate changing environments, those practices develop into new social norms.

Strongly dissonant strands exist within Khmer masculinity. These exist in tension within individual men, among groups of men, and at the societal level. When they are with their socializing groups, men in this study highly value heavy alcohol consumption, sexual appetite, conquest, performance, and pleasure indulgence. This finding is supported by the studies of others who have explored men's sex-seeking habits (Bearup, 2003; Ramage, 2002; Tarr and Aggleton, 1999). Men who have sex many times in one night, who are skillful at convincing women to have sex with them, and who are always enthusiastic about seeking sex are admired by their group mates.

⁶ Although this is perhaps most apparent where men present themselves in forms that are radically different from mainstream norms (e.g., *katoy*, transgender males), recognizably “manly” masculinities often diverge significantly along ethnic, social class, urban-rural, or regional lines.

A friend said, “You ate five dishes? I had seven last time.” And another said, “You ate seven? I even had one cooking pot.” Then I said, “You only had one pot but I even had a frying pan” [Our friends] just laughed. They said, “You had five plates, and you had one frying pan. All of you are useless. You all just stayed by yourselves and slept without doing anything till morning.” [Unmarried, 23-year-old student]

In their social groups, men in the study are on the watch for lack of enthusiasm for seeking sex, which is interpreted as weakness and “punished” with taunts and teases about being unmasculine – gay, womanly, *katoey*, cowardly, or fearful of one’s wife. Conversely, power and prestige are accumulated within men’s groups by demonstrating maximum commitment to the group, which is understood by most men as socializing, drinking alcohol, and “going for a walk” (sex-seeking) *as a group*. This strand of masculinity can be labeled *pleasure-indulgent masculinity*. In relating the narratives of nights that end with one or more of their social groupmates having sex, expressions of pleasure-indulgent masculinity predominated.

In contrast to this aspect of Khmer masculinity, there is an ideal that derives from traditions of filial piety, social harmony, and self-restraint. When asked about their personal values, men in the study overwhelmingly cite showing respect to elders, not going out for sex or not doing so excessively, taking responsibility for one’s actions, being responsible to family and society, behaving honestly, and demonstrating a future-oriented outlook.

After work, [a good man] comes home . . . and when he goes somewhere, he tells his wife the time he’s supposed to be back or that he will not be back home that night. Well, this is why I respect him because he doesn’t go out wastefully like us. He’s not like us. [Married, 27-year-old office administrator]

This strand, here referred to as *self-restraint masculinity*, is most evident when men are asked for their individual opinions about men who don’t frequently seek commercial sex and men who are admirable. In the study, few men say they admire men who have many sex partners or who frequently have sex with commercial partners.

I think it is good if men are not engaging in this type of service. This way it will be very beneficial to our family. [Unmarried, 26-year-old civil servant]

I think that [my friend who doesn’t join us for sex] is good since he is able to control his urges. When a man can control himself not to have sex, it is good for him since it enables him to avoid many problems. . . . The man who doesn’t have sex with outside girls is regarded as the best man in the society. [Unmarried, 23-year-old student]

Men in the study are aware that “outside” sex-seeking is not highly prized by society, by families, or even by many men outside their socializing groups. In addition, many of the men in the study say that they themselves do not hold men who frequently seek commercial sex in high esteem.

It’s good if we don’t have sex with prostitutes. . . . Yeah, so then we can communicate with other people. Sometimes, some people, both men and women, don’t like talking to us when they know we often go to have sex. [Unmarried, 23-year-old mobile phone technician]

Given that the majority of the men reported having sex with entertainment workers, the strong evocation of the self-restraint masculinity strand is all the more notable.

These competing notions about masculinity often complicate men’s sexual decision-making. For younger, single men in the study, many of whom live at home or with relatives, following the pleasure-indulgent strand causes conflict with parents or other elders. Married men describe near-constant friction between demonstrating loyalty to the peer group and to their wives.

There is a noteworthy contrast between the private value systems men articulate and the standards that groups of men impose on one another. This dissonance is most noticeable in the men participating in the study when they are asked to say what they think about men who rarely go “outside” for sex, and then are asked what other men they know say about such men.

What do you think of a man who doesn’t go for sex?

I think he’s good because he can control his urges well. I really admire him.

What do other men think or say about such men?

They say he’s a coward and he doesn’t even know how to have sex. [Unmarried, 25-year-old student]

Individual men characterize men-who-opt-out in very positive terms. When asked what they think about men when they separate from the group, most men in the study say that they understand that people have obligations that they cannot avoid. Most men in all sub-groups in the study also express admiration for men who frequently resist the urge to have sex “outside.” However, when asked to describe what other men say about such men, the tone shifts immediately and terms like “gay,” “womanly,” “like a girl,” and “cowardly,” are repeatedly cited.

Some men can laugh off these taunts to their masculinity. Others, however, react strongly and are moved to prove their heterosexual prowess to their group mates. Younger men, in particular, are likely to respond to the teasing by accepting the challenge.

When you called him a coward, how did he reply?

He said, “If you want to know whether I’m a coward or not, call a girl right now and I will do something for you to see.” [Unmarried, 26-year-old private sector employee]

[We called him] filthy words such as “coward” and “chicken-hearted guy”. . . .

How do they feel when hearing such bad words?

Some say, “You look down on me? Wait, I will go out with you too.” But some others who are confident, they don’t go with us. [Unmarried, 21-year-old student]

Although there is widespread acceptance among men in the study that it is “natural” for men to seek sex outside of relationships, it is also widely believed that recurrent drunkenness and transactional sex-seeking violate social mores. Men, particularly younger men and those from higher-SES strata, are aware that what they do with their social groups is something that could bring dishonor to their families. While many men in the study report experiencing anxiety in trying to meet the expectations of family and society while maintaining strong ties to their social group, nearly all men also believe that a desire to have multiple sex partners and to experience a variety of sexual sensations is part of being a man in contemporary Cambodia.

There is a reservoir of desire to *not* feel compelled to go for sex every time one or two members in a social group want to go. Very few men in the study say they *never* want to go for sex. Being social, an important value that cuts across both strands of Khmer masculinity, implies that they should stay with the group when some members seek sex. However, being social also entails not causing problems in the family, community, or society. And some men in the study identify excessive sex-seeking to be the cause of social problems.

The two strands of masculinity are not found in equal measure in every man. In the study, men who are leaders in their socializing groups tend to act as the voice of hedonism. Within groups, these men tend to be the loudest, most confident, most sexually experienced men, and they have the most

impact on group decision-making. Men in the study strive to demonstrate to their social group that they are in full solidarity with their groupmates, the proof of which is willingness to engage in all group activities, including seeking sex with entertainment workers. The competition within the group to express maximum desire (and to have reaped maximum pleasure) strongly reinforces the power of pleasure-indulgent masculinity.

Decision-making Patterns

The data reveal two principal decision-making patterns that result in men seeking sex when out socializing in Phnom Penh. The first results from having discussed a plan for the evening in advance with group mates that includes, explicitly, the goal to seek sex, usually by bringing a woman to a guesthouse or visiting a brothel. This can be characterized as *instrumental sex-seeking*.

We gather together and we chat . . . because our goal is: today I want to have sex with a girl. So, I go to meet my friend and see whether he has money. We know that we want to have sex already at the start. [Unmarried, 30-year-old motorcycle taxi driver]

Instrumental sex-seeking creates more certainty and produces less anxiety and fewer tactics for evasion among men who are ambivalent about seeking sex. While most men say they are enthusiastic when their friends invite them to an evening of sex-seeking-oriented socializing, men in the study describe being more able to say no when they are called or visited by a peer who wishes to plan a night that includes sex *before the night has commenced*.

The second pattern involves the combination of alcohol, peer pressure, and the presence of sexily clad women to produce a decision to seek sex where it was either not intended or not made explicitly the goal of the evening's socializing. This can be characterized as *contingent sex-seeking*. Contingent sex-seeking, even when men know there is a very good chance that the evening will result in sex, shifts decision-making accountability from individual men to the social group, the environment, and, particularly, the effects of drunkenness.

I just go with my friends and after drinking, we start to have sexual desire. With the addition of bright colors of the night and sexiness of the girls, we cannot control our feelings, so we go to find a girl for sex. [Unmarried, 22-year-old civil servant]

I didn't know in advance because it wasn't until we got drunk that we'd know who wanted to go have sex. [Married, 35-year-old soldier]

Deferring the decision—or deferring acknowledgment of a tacit decision—appears to be a way for many men to evade responsibility for their actions. It also enables men to follow the wishes of the group, which promotes solidarity and avoids or postpones potential conflict.

There are strong patterns in the data regarding which sorts of men decide in advance that an evening will result in commercial sex, and those for whom the decision is deferred until the evening is underway and the three triggers of drunkenness, desirable women, and peer sex talk are present.

Students in the study say they rarely know in advance whether an evening will result in sex. It is unclear if this is the result of reticence to state their intentions or genuine spontaneity.⁷ By shifting responsibility for seeking sex onto the flow of the evening's events and environmental factors, students avoid confronting dissonance between their parents' expectations and their own behavior patterns.

In my group, first we gather together not because we have an intention to have sex. We just gather to enjoy drinking and eating, but when we drink a lot and see beautiful girls, we start to have a desire, and then it leads us to finding a girl for sex. [Unmarried, 25-year-old student]

We don't have an intention to have sex. First we just gather together to go out. If someone wants to drink, he just drinks a little bit. But, at that time, when we see a beautiful girl, we have a desire to find a girl for sex. [Unmarried, 22-year-old student]

Most of the military men in the study say they usually don't know in advance whether an evening of socializing will include transactional sex. They tend not to discuss the program for the evening until after they have been drinking and feel that sex "happens by chance."

Lower-SES men in the study, including cyclo (rickshaw) drivers, motorcycle taxi drivers, laborers, and security guards, say they know in advance when sex will occur.

Mostly we shared the expense. We thought in advance and planned. We planned what to eat...

I want to clarify at what point you had the urge to find girls for sex; at what time? Early in the evening or after you drink beer?

⁷ One result of the lack of planning among students is they are least likely among men in the study to carry condoms, as they remain acutely worried about being revealed as "naughty" to parents, girlfriends, or peers.

Mostly we think about that before we drink. In fact we think about girls before beer.

You planned in advance?

That's right. We thought about going to drink beer, then getting one girl each, and planned in advance. [Married, 28-year-old security guard]

This may be because lower-SES men must do the cost accounting beforehand in order to know whether transactional sex is within their means that, for them, instrumentally planned evenings are usually linked to payday for at least one man in the group.

Sexual Decision-making and Group Dynamics

Among the study participants, most men's socializing groups are comprised of friends and are stable from outing to outing. A few men in the study socialize with one or two other men, but most men have four to six companions on an evening out. A few men in the study said their social group included men from their home village. Other men had met through work or school, though only one man in the study said he regularly socializes with office colleagues.

In most men's groups there is a leader. This is often the oldest member of the group, usually the boldest and the men willing or able to spend the most money.

I usually ask them to go with me, as I am the leading person. I usually get them together, hence I'm like the big brother in the group. And if I refuse to go with them, they would think that I should not be the big brother in my group anymore. [Married, 35-year-old soldier]

Group solidarity is enormously important to the men in the study. An individual's decision-making with respect to seeking sex with the group is viewed as a measure of his commitment to maintaining solidarity.

All friends have to be brave together. Otherwise they cannot be friends with each other.

Brave, what does that mean?

Brave means that if one of our friends says, "Let's go to find girls," the others must go too. [Unmarried, 26-year-old private sector employee]

Groups of men usually make decisions together, which fosters solidarity by subordinating individuals to the will of the group. When one member asserts the privilege to make individualistic decisions, other members act assertively to rein him in.

We'd grab his hand and get him on a motorbike. When we arrived at the eating and drinking place, it would be too late for him to refuse. So, our ideas became one. [Unmarried, 26-year-old private sector employee]

Many married men experience conflicting allegiance between their wives and families, and their loyalty to the group. Most men cannot clearly articulate this tension; they express an either/or mindset when men in their group appear to be prioritizing wife and family over the socializing group.

“Do not consider your wife more important than your friends.” Mostly, we talk like this. “With your friends you have been together for many years; but your wife, you just got married a few years ago. And you're now taking your wife to be more important than your friends? What, your mother-in-law? Oh, please. My mother-in-law never dares with me. Do not be more afraid of your mother-in-law or your wife than me.” [Married, 27-year-old office administrator]

One reason why group cohesion is important to men in the study is that because for many men, going to seek sex alone is sordid and shameful. When done in groups as part of socializing and under the cloak of nighttime drunkenness, sex-seeking is viewed as a “natural” part of men's social character. It is important, therefore, to ensure that members of a group stay together to avoid being viewed (by oneself as well as others) as the type of man who goes alone.

I don't think it's important to force others to go. . . . We are all grown-ups. Forcing is not necessary. If they want, they can go; but if they don't, they don't need to go. In fact, the only reason [for persuading them] is so our friends don't think that we've gone to eat that [sex] alone. [Married, 28-year-old rice seller]

Group cohesion, staying together for the entire evening including going as a group for sex, is maintained through a combination of enticement, persuasion, and mockery. Enticement comes in the form of lascivious descriptions of women and sex, and offers to pay the fee to hire an entertainment worker.

There is a person in my group that I tease when he doesn't go. First we eat with each other. While we're eating, I try to persuade him to go. I threaten him, saying “If you don't go, you have to pay for all the food” I start to mock him, saying “You're a coward, like a tortoise in the shell. You don't know anything about sex. . . . Are you gay? Let me touch

your penis.” When we use the same words over and over, sometimes he gets angry and says, “Let’s go. I don’t care how much I have to pay, let’s just go there.” [Married, 32-year-old soldier]

Money acts as a lever to convince reluctant men to stay with the group. Men pool their money at the beginning of the evening. The money is counted and decisions are made about what is possible with the amount collected. The money pool produces consensus about how many stops and what activities will occur in an evening.

We discuss among each other how many girls we will take so that the money that we have raised earlier from each other will be enough. If we haven’t discussed with each other, we don’t know how much money we have and how many girls we should take.

How do you help your group to make the decision?

I just finalize it. . . . For example, if they can only pay for girls for two or three members, I pay for the rest up to four members. [Unmarried, 26-year-old private sector employee]

A man who is determined to seek sex can put in extra money and have more input than those who put in less—whether they intend to seek sex that night or not—in the decision about whether to end the evening before continuing to a guesthouse or brothel for sex. Pooling money also allows social group membership to remain quite stable, since having less money on a certain night doesn’t preclude a man from equal participation.

One tactic that groups of men use to convince a reluctant man to continue for sex is to tell him that it is okay if he leaves but if he does, he has to pay for the other men to continue.

If I try to refuse, they still plead with me to go. Even if they agreed with my refusal they would say, “You can choose not to go with us but you’ll have to pay for all the food on the table, and also the fee for each girl that we take out.” When they say this, it makes me unable to refuse, and I have to go. [Married, 32-year-old soldier]

Whether such threats get enforced or not, it is clear that many men take them very seriously, saying that once their group-mates threaten them with the bill, they feel compelled to stay.

In younger men’s groups, if several men express their desire not to continue for sex during the decision-making process, the group will usually disband for the night and none of its members will go for sex. In such circumstances, the lever of offering to pay for those who wish to opt out is less

tenable, as the cost of paying for several men is onerous. For this reason, when multiple men state that they do not wish to proceed to seek sex, the other members of the group often accept that it will not happen on that night. No respondents said they planned ahead with other members of their group who might not wish to seek sex.

Self-efficacy and Locus of Control: Tactics for Opting Out

The high value placed on group cohesion makes opting out of sex during the course of an evening of socializing very difficult for all but the most self-confident men. Men fear that if they refuse to go for sex with their social group, they won't be invited in the future and the friendships may cease. While many men in the study say they are just teasing when they try to convince their companions to continue for sex, the threat to end or curtail a friendship is taken quite seriously by most men on the receiving end. This appears to be with good reason. Many younger men report that if a social companion refuses to accompany the group for sex several times, they will not be asked again in the future. For students living away from their home provinces, in particular, the prospect of being cut off from social ties is distressing.

When we invite them two or three times and they reject us, the next time we usually ignore them. The consequence for them is that they will little by little become far away from their friends. [Unmarried, 22-year-old student]

They say, "If you don't go with us, we don't need to go anywhere together anymore. Everything ends now." So, we have to force ourselves to go with them. [Unmarried, 25-year-old student]

A few older, married men in the study express confidence in their ability to say yes to sex sometimes and no others. Some older men in the study also expressed fear of the consequences of saying no to their friends. For them, though, the fear is that the bonds of friendship will weaken until the relationship dissolves, rather than being abruptly dropped by the group.

We spoke in advance: "After drinking, where will you go?" I asked. He said "I will go to have sex." I said "Hey! I'm not going to go." He said "You have to go. I'm going, so you should go, too." When he says it like that, we have to go; if we don't go, it means that we are against him. Thus, our friendship will be broken up. Therefore, to keep up our friendship strong or to avoid an argument between us, we have to go to have sex. [34-year-old chicken seller]

The strong cultural tradition of avoiding direct conflict makes forthright refusals rare, and leads men to concoct an array of reasons and excuses that they hope will allow them to exercise their intention to avoid sex on a particular evening. According to some men in the study, a straightforward “no” is tantamount to ending the friendship. However, men are unanimous in saying that some reasons are truly justified for splitting off from the group.

Sometimes it was reasonable when I spoke out. They let me go because I said my son is sick or my wife is sick, and then they let me go home at once. [Married, 31-year-old motorcycle taxi driver]

Among the most accepted are: a sick wife or child; an obligation to a relative; the need to travel outside Phnom Penh; or an obligation to attend a ceremonial function.

It is notable that none of the most accepted reasons for opting out stem from the feelings or even activities of the man who is attempting to opt out. Men do report, however, a second tier of variably acceptable reasons for opting out that have to do with the health and family situation of the person opting out. These include: illness; a bad hangover; a lack of sexual desire stemming from too much recent sex; the desire to not further inflame an angry wife.

When they say, “Hey my friend, let’s go sing karaoke,” if we say, “No I can’t. My wife is not happy,” it’s still difficult [to not go] because our friends would say, “What? Are you afraid of your wife?” If they say this, it’s hard to respond. But I can say it in another way, “If you want me to go with you, do you want to see me dead or alive? I’m still hung over from drinking with you yesterday.” Then our friends would not pressure us to go any more. [Married, 35-year-old soldier]

The degree to which men’s social groups accept these reasons has to do with how the speaker is positioned within the group—men who can normally be counted on to “go for a walk” tend to have more leeway—and the strictness of the particular group.

In many groups comprised of married men, a man saying that he wishes to opt out of sex because his wife will be angry or because he doesn’t want to cause his wife grief is an ineffective tactic. It generally invites taunts about being weak or fearful and is seen by groups of men as an illegitimate reason for not continuing for sex. Knowing this, many men concoct alternative reasons that will bring less scorn and will honor the importance of group socializing. Many men in the study are keenly aware that certain reasons are acceptable to their group while others are met with derision.

Men report that claiming poverty is an ineffective opt-out tactic due to money pooling and offers to treat that are difficult to turn down. Snubbing another man's offer to pay is considered rude by many men and violates the norm that dictates that men should pay according to their ability on a given night. A high degree of fortitude is required for a man—even one who has resolved not to seek sex—to refuse a friend's offer to pay for the evening.

Men in the study describe a range of tactics for getting their groups to “allow” them to go home before having commercial sex. A handful of men in the study say they often accompany their friends to a guesthouse or brothel but usually wait outside with the motorcycles and do not have sex. This form of opting out requires maximum decisiveness and willpower. The unifying factor among the few men who *regularly* accompany their friends to guesthouses and brothels but who usually don't engage in sex is that they have made a policy-level decision to never or rarely have sex with entertainment workers. The men in the study who have made such a decision are married and yet appear to be unafraid of or minimally impacted by their group-mates' taunts about fearing their wives.

If my friends invite me, I go there to dine and sing. In the late evening, after dining and singing, my friends say, “Let's go to have sex.” Then I say, “No, I'm afraid of my wife. If you want to go, I can accompany you, but I am not going to have sex.” [Married, 35-year-old-soldier]

The one unmarried man in the study who regularly accompanies his group to karaoke and guesthouses but doesn't have sex is terrified of AIDS due to seeing the “horrible” sight of a formerly plump neighbor waste away from the illness.

More commonly, men concoct stories that allow them to leave the group without causing a confrontation over group solidarity. Some men stage elaborate ruses to get their friends to allow them to leave:

“For me, I have one way to make my friends accept my decision. I sneak to the toilet and call my wife, telling her to call me back and say that she is not well. When she calls, I turn on the speaker to let them listen. In this way, they let me go right away because my wife is waiting and we do not know how she is. She is alone and sick so they tell me to hurry back home.” [Married, 27-year-old quality control manager]

Other men describe turning off the lights at home and hiding away from windows in case their friends stop by their houses on their way to the first drinking locale. Another fictive reason to opt out cited by several men was the need to go to their village for a family event.

Men also report many less effective tactics for opting out. For most married men, saying they are worried their wife will be angry if they stay out late or have sex “outside” mainly invites ridicule and enhanced peer pressure from group-mates. Single men living at home are only accorded slightly more leeway if they say their parents will be angry with them if they stay out late. In such cases, the group attempts to persuade the reluctant man to accompany them to the guesthouse to have “only one dish” (sex one time) and then go home.

The claim of being too busy to socialize is ineffective because it represents a tacit prioritization of other activities over the peer group. When a man says to his group-mates that he feels ill and so cannot drink, other members of the group say either that it is okay to not drink but that he should still come out to eat dinner and partake in social activities, or that feeling ill means that he should have only two or three drinks but accompany them for the whole evening.

For example, a friend said he couldn’t drink so we said it was not reasonable that he couldn’t drink because he drinks every day. If he said he was busy and then we saw him at home then we knew it was just an excuse. If he said he was sick then it was okay. . . . If he said he couldn’t drink, then we told him, “We’re only asking you to sit with us.” [Married, 35-year-old soldier]

Many men in the study have a fatalistic attitude toward trying to opt out of sex. They say that when their friends pressure them strongly, they are powerless to resist and must continue to the brothel or guesthouse and have sex. In contrast, several men in the study report that after they started declining to accompany their friends for sex, their social group became accustomed to them coming along for all parts of the evening up to the guesthouse or brothel, and then returning home without engaging in commercial sex. These men report peer pressure to stay with the group for sex diminishes rapidly after establishing a new pattern and reputation.

[After refusing sex] people will ask us to go two or three more times and after that they won’t ask to go any more. But there won’t be any rejection for eating [dinner]. When we talk about going to karaoke and having girls around us, then I won’t decline to join, but I don’t go with them to have sex because at that point people now discreetly disappear. [Unmarried, 27-year-old private sector employee]

Usually, after we refuse two or three times, then no one dares to ask again. People may say that they will go and look for a girl and ask, “Are you going to come with me?” But they know that the response will be negative, so they won't force me like before. [Unmarried, 26-year-old government employee]

It appears to be unnecessary for men to *never* go for sex in order to create new sets of expectations among their socializing groups. Rather, to change the dynamic, it appears to be sufficient for a man to establish with his group that he cannot be counted on to accompany them for sex even when he lacks a certifiably acceptable excuse or reason.

DISCUSSION

The results of the present study describe patterns in Cambodian men's socializing and decision-making. These patterns emerge from men's attempts to manage conflicting notions of Khmer masculinity as well as the strong peer pressure to maintain group solidarity. Peer pressure and the importance of group identification for the men interviewed make it difficult for them to opt out of commercial sex when socializing with their peers. Reluctance to risk abandonment by friends if they opt out, as well as the strong Khmer cultural emphasis on group harmony and conflict avoidance make independent sexual decision-making difficult or impossible for all but the most confident and self-efficacious men. As a result, many men resort to concocting excuses, which are often unsuccessful, to avoid accompanying their group for transactional sex.

Seeking sex with entertainment workers is considered by men in the study to strengthen group bonds and to be a demonstration of commitment to friendship. In the abstract, men in the study generally view men who abstain or rarely engage in transactional sex in positive terms. However, while out socializing men tease and taunt their group-mates as being gay or cowardly if they express reluctance to join the group for sex with entertainment workers. Despite this, there exists among the men in the study a reservoir of desire to *not* feel compelled to go for sex every time some members in their social group want to go. Currently, though, many men feel that when their friends pressure them strongly, they are powerless to resist and must continue to the brothel or guesthouse and have sex. Few men say they *never* want to go for sex, but many men want to have more control over when they agree to go with their group.

Strong group pressure is seen by many men as preventing them from acting on their own will to sometimes opt out of transactional sex. However, most men feel they face their social group alone, and appear to be unaware that a desire to sometimes opt out of sex is common among men. The presence of these desires must become an open subject of conversation within social groups in order to prevent men from feeling that they are facing the unified group alone.

Strongly dissonant strands exist within Khmer masculinity. One strand, *pleasure-indulgent masculinity*, rewards maximum commitment to the social group, which is demonstrated through socializing, heavy drinking of alcohol, and “going for a walk” (seeking commercial sex). Another strand, *self-restraint masculinity*, derives from traditions of filial piety, controlling one’s urges, and social harmony. To date, studies of commercial sex-seeking behavior and attitudes in Cambodia have focused exclusively on the pleasure-indulgent half of the Khmer masculinity dualism. In particular, the normative nature of transactional sex-seeking that is a central element in pleasure-indulgent masculinity has been stressed. Networking theory stresses the possibility of affirmation that seeking sex in groups and the potential disruption of opting out poses. Currently, many men feel that when their friends pressure them strongly, they are powerless to resist and must continue to the brothel or guesthouse and have sex. Few men say they *never* want to go for sex, but many men want to have more control over whether and when they agree to go with their group.

This desire is linked to self-restraint masculinity, which is present in nearly all men in the study, and which leads them to consider to impact of decisions on their family’s reputation and standing in the community. Even for men who live far from their home villages, concerns about what their parents or wives would think about their drinking and sex-seeking behavior are ever-present, at least up until the combination of drunkenness, attractive women, and peer pressure take over.

It is important to acknowledge the fact that men reap real and important rewards in terms of self-esteem, belonging/identity, and happiness from *pleasure-indulgent masculinity*. Ignoring these rewards would lead to ineffective messaging. Attempts to minimize the importance to men of the power, pleasure, and social acceptance they gain will always be swimming upstream so long as men lack viable alternatives. In their social groups pleasure-seeking masculinity is central to discourse and experience. It is public and an explicit topic of much conversation. When in public, self-restraint masculinity remains a lonely voice relegated to internal monologues and one-against-the-group

futility. The reluctance of men to discuss moral and reputational concerns with their friends solidifies the divide between the two notions of masculinity.

Increasing discussion among men who socialize in groups and seek sex with entertainment workers may have a strong impact on changing social norms. The evidence in the study is unclear on whether it is individual characteristics that allow some men to opt out while maintaining their group ties. However, as shown by the experience of those men who have been able to dramatically shift group expectations by making it known in advance that they would not always be joining the group when it decides to seek sex with entertainment workers, there is reason to believe that fears of being ostracized would be mitigated if men judged group-leaving against actual behavior patterns rather than the ideal of perfect solidarity. If more men engaged in conversations where their private thoughts were publicly recognized and validated, it would likely diminish their need to lie and make excuses to their social group when they choose not to seek sex with them.

Study Limitations

The original study design, following the Vietnam study, “Behind the Pleasure,” was based on a partner reduction programmatic strategy. After data was collected but before analysis was complete, this focus was deemphasized in favor of targeting men with sweethearts for increased condom usage. The results of the present study were used to inform the revised strategy. The discussion guides used and the approach taken were not, however, optimized for learning about sexual decision-making in the context of sweetheart relationships.

Programmatic and Research Recommendations

The results of this study lead to a set of programmatic recommendations that rest on a more nuanced understanding of the ways that masculinity functions in Cambodian men’s sexual decision-making. Outreach programming should be developed that targets the divide between private and public notions of masculinity. If more men engaged in conversations wherein their private thoughts were publicly recognized and validated, it would likely diminish their need to lie and make excuses to their social group when they choose not to seek sex with them. Efforts to facilitate discussions with men *in their social groups* could open paths of conversation about choice-making within the group context. From such discussions, men could develop the confidence and skills to opt out of sex after

an evening of socializing has begun. More important in the longer run, group norms can be targeted for modification.

Facilitated conversations among peers held *in the places where they socialize* could be used to boost men's self-efficacy to opt out of sex. Currently, there is little or no social support for opting out of transactional sex when men are socializing with their friends. The men in the study who do opt out appear to have unusually strong self-efficacy and ability to resist peer pressure. Helping men to discuss the difficulties they have when they attempt to opt out of sex can contribute to efforts to recast acting on one's will to opt out as an act of strength (or character), rather than one of cowardice. Younger men (25 and under) should be targeted as they are least often willing to risk group disapproval and most susceptible to peer pressure.

Messaging should be developed that highlights the costs of pleasure-indulgent masculinity to self, family, and society. A significant number of men in the study are embarrassed or ashamed of their drinking and sex-seeking behavior. A shame-based, though realistic, campaign would likely ring true to many men who feel caught between allegiance to their social group and to a frayed-but-still-operative moral code.

Messaging should be developed that enhances the profile of *self-restraint masculinity*. It is vital that such messaging does not come across as moralistically "preachy" in tone. Rather, scenarios that do justice to the complexity of men's conflicting feelings about sexual decision-making (that make use of hegemonic and alternate forms of masculinity) will resonate more authentically with high-risk men. Men need and want tools to increase self-efficacy when negotiating their way in and out of group socializing. Role models who are fun-loving, group-dedicated members *who also possess the ability to say no to sex* could de-stigmatize men who opt out while also showing them how to retain their active social lives and strong group bonds.

Enlisting establishment owners to support programming promoting safer behavior among clients would magnify the value of entertainment establishment-based efforts by creating an environment that encourages safer sexual decision-making. At minimum, establishment-based programming will require the permission of establishment owners in order to conduct discussions in their establishments. In addition, mobilizing establishment owners to place or sell condoms on their

premises may alleviate the anxiety that many men say prevents from them consistently carrying condoms.

Clients should be targeted in the early evening, when they are together with their peers, but not yet too drunk to listen and reflect on their socializing patterns. Lower-socioeconomic status men, such as motorcycle taxi drivers and laborers should be targeted around paydays, to which their sex-seeking socializing is frequently linked.

Finally, while perhaps outside the scope of the current study, a key to changing men's sexual-decision making is changing the way they consume alcohol and the license that alcohol provides for them to act in ways that they would not when sober (or less drunk). Getting men to drink more moderately so that they are less likely to "lose control," "forget" to wear a condom and more able to use one properly could be important to longer-term efforts to improve men's sexual health and safety.

APPENDIX A – THREE ARCHETYPES: THA, RITH, AND SOK

Tha is 24 years old. He is a student at a university in Phnom Penh. Tha is single as are most of his friends. On most weekend evenings, he goes out with five or six friends. Some are students, and one works in a casino. They speak to each other on their hand phones during the day to make an appointment to meet at a soup restaurant or at a friend's house. They gather at 6 o'clock. Tha says they get drunk "so that our friendship becomes closer and closer." They have a lot of free time in the evening and they like going around to see the pretty girls riding motos and at the riverside. To talk about drinking, Tha and his friends use the code "to have a bit." Besides this phrase, they also use "have a glass" and "fanning the fire."

At the soup restaurant, Tha and his group talk about their studies, work, pretty girls, sex techniques, and tell jokes to create a joyful atmosphere in the group. Tha and his group mostly drink Anchor beer, unless they are short on money, when they drink Sneng Toun mixed with soft drinks or Muscle wine. They sit and drink happily, toasting each other when the conversation goes quiet. After getting a bit drunk, Tha gets bolder and talks to the beer promotion girls. He tries to make them laugh by teasing them, "Hey, where do I know you from? Oh, I can't believe you forgot me so soon!"

When they are quite drunk, after they've become aroused by watching the beautiful beer promoters, Tha and his group move from the soup restaurant to sing karaoke at a small place in Tuol Kork. When they arrive at the karaoke place, Tha and his group touch the girls by "kissing, embracing, and squeezing them with our hands." They usually sing for one or two hours, depending on how much money they have.

Tha and his group say the main factors that lead them to have sex are drunkenness and talking with the beer promotion girls. When Tha and his group look at sexy girls, they get gooseflesh and their saliva flows. Seeing women with "sexy clothes which show parts of their breasts and hot thighs" makes them think of having sex. Tha says their desire to seek sex is triggered by wanting to relieve stress, discussions about girls, and his friends' invitations to have sex.

Tha and his group like using the signal words which related to sex such as: visiting relatives; going to pump water at the pond; giving water to the turtle; restoring your gun head; going for a chick; and going for a walk.

Tha and his group always put pressure on one another to persuade all the group members to go for sex together. If someone refuses to go they say, "If you don't go with us, let's end our friendship." He also tries to convince his friends by saying, "I'll pay for you so you must go"; "You were born a human so you must socialize"; and "Please, don't be such a show off." When one of his friends starts to leave, Tha "grabs his hand and pulls him on the motorbike," squeezing him between two people so he can't get away. To convince a reluctant man, Tha and his group tease him, saying, "coward, you're a man with a female character and a worrier....why don't you become a monk?"

When Tha doesn't want to go to have sex with his group, he tries various tactics to get his group to accept his decision. He tells them he has problems with health, family, work, money, or he lacks the urge. For health problems, he says he's exhausted, sick, or having a problem with his penis. Sometimes he says he doesn't have much money, he promises he'll go next time, or that he's afraid to be infected by AIDS. Sometimes, even though his refusal can cause a problem in his relationship with his group, he sticks to his guns and doesn't go with them.

The sex partners of Tha and his group are mostly brothel-based entertainment workers from Bun Pav, a guesthouse near Sorya Shopping Centre. Tha seeks sex using many different techniques. Sometimes, he takes a girl from karaoke, U2, or Sorya to have sex with his group, which allows them to have sex multiple times in one night for one price. He prides himself on being able to have sexual intercourse four times in one night.

After having sex, Tha and his group talk about the girls they had sex with. They say “How many times did you have sex?” “Was it hard?” “What techniques did you use?” “Did you use doggie style?” “I used all 36 techniques.”

Tha and his friends always think about condoms when they socialize together in the evening because they think that condoms can prevent them from diseases. Tha always uses a condom whenever he has sexual intercourse with an entertainment worker. Some of Tha’s friends are afraid they might bring the disease to their homes, so they always remind each other to use condoms. “Man! When you have sex with a girl, don’t forget to use condom. Your future is still a long way off. If you have sex without a condom, your future will end. If you’re infected, you’ll die. You have to think about your long future. If you don’t think about that, you should think about your parents.”

But, once in a while, Tha and his friends “forget” to use a condom when they are too drunk. Another reason Tha sometimes doesn’t use a condom is due to his trust in his sweetheart: “If we buy condoms to wear, it will damage our intimacy.” Tha is knowledgeable about how to make sure a condom is dependable: “You check your condom whether it retains air or not.” Tha and his group are always afraid that condoms might be damaged or torn, and they are also not confident in condoms provided by entertainment workers. They believe that a girl “might have AIDS and she may take a needle to make holes in the condom” in order to “contaminate them.”

In Tha’s group, some men take condoms with them; others don’t because they are embarrassed to keep condoms in their pocket. Tha doesn’t think it’s that important to carry a condom because he gets them on the street or at the guesthouse.

Tha admires men who socialize. Such a man must also “know what is good and what is bad in the society,” be responsible for work, brave in facing the truth, and be a man of his word. He must schedule time to do work and also for his family; he must love his family and act responsibly to his family. He should be charitable and also be friendly, obedient, honest, sensitive, and humble. He should think about the future, be patient, and control his urges.

On the other hand, Tha doesn’t respect men who aren’t brave enough to have sex, who “refuse to go with us when we ask them,” who “feel afraid, shy and can’t face girls.” These men “behave like girls” and Tha labels them *a ngii* or *Katoey*.

Rith is a 32-year-old army officer. Most men in Rith’s socializing group are also military men.

Rith gathers with four or five friends two or three times per week, mostly on the weekends. Usually, they gather and eat and drink but don’t seek sex, though they are tempted by the beautiful women who serve them beer and food. Rith says that he and his friends go for sex once a week or once every two weeks, but when he was single he used to go for sex almost every night. Although Rith is married, his wife lives in his home province. Unlike other married men in his social group, who live with their wives, Rith does not have to constantly manage his wife’s views on his nighttime social activities; he considers only his money situation and level of desire when deciding whether or not to seek sex in the course of a night out with his friends.

Rith and his friends do not know at the outset of an evening out if it will involve sex. Rith says that without drinking, he absolutely won't seek sex and he views alcohol as the primary cause of his sex-seeking desire. Once he has alcohol in his body and there are pretty girls around serving drinks or waitressing, he and his friends will decide to go for sex without having a detailed conversation about it. "When we see waitresses wearing skimpy clothes while we are eating, we start to think about sex. We see her sexy body, her knee, then, we start to measure her vagina."

Even if Rith isn't thinking about sex when at the start of an evening, the conversation while eating at the barbecue or soup restaurant will always turn towards girls. This, combined with getting drunk, turns Rith's mind towards sex and he and his group start discussing which place they will go to find women to sleep with. "We should go to that place," Rith's friend says, "there are a lot of young new chickens there." Rith says this makes the group decide to go for sex.

When Rith wants to go for a night of drinking and sex, he sometimes has to strategize to make sure his friend can come with him. He starts the evening by going to his friend's house to have some drinks. While there, he tells his friend's wife that there is a ceremony at his relative's house and that he'd like her husband to accompany him there. Rith thinks that in most cases wives cannot "keep up with the tricks of their husbands." When speaking to other members of his group about the decision to seek girls for sex, Rith is direct, "Now that we are drunk, we should go find a girl to release our feeling." Most of Rith's friends always agree to go together.

However, Rith does have in his social circle one man who accompanies the group for eating and drinking, and often rides with them when they go to guesthouses for sex, but who never has sex with entertainment workers. Rith's friend says that since he can have sex with his wife for free, he "prefers to save his money for drinking and having soup."

When a member of Rith's social group tries to opt out of the sex-seeking part of the evening, he tells the group that he has a sick relative in the provinces or that his health is not up to going because he has had too much sex recently. When this occurs, the group puts pressure on the man to stay, saying "You can choose to not go with us, but you have to pay for all the food on the table, and also the fee for each girl that we take out." More times than not, this proves persuasive and the group stays together. As Rith says, "there is no room for the word 'enough.'"

Rith and his group are not immune to the tensions that nighttime socializing places on their relationships with their wives. Rith says they have more sympathy for a man who wants to go home before seeking sex if they have seen his wife earlier in the evening. "Though we can have delicious food from heaven," he says, when we see the look on the wife's face and the problems socializing is causing, "we should not ask him to go out; we link the problem to ourselves."

Some men in Rith's group feel the decision about whether or not to seek sex sets their feelings about their wife and family against their friends' desires to preserve camaraderie. Rith says that he's usually able to persuade these men to join him to go for sex. Rith does this by saying that if his friend uses a condom he doesn't need to fear infecting his wife and children with HIV. If that doesn't work, he might make a joke, "I'm not forcing him to step on a bomb; I just want him to go have sex." To persuade their reluctant companion, Rith's group also accuses him of being gay. Rith teases him, saying that "Your wife's face looks like shit, I'm proud that you can even have sex with her." One time, Rith physically shoved his friend in front of the girl when he hesitated in the doorway of the guesthouse room.

Despite the intense pressure to not opt out of sex when out socializing, Rith admits that on an average evening only three of his group of five will go for sex. The other two will leave the group by saying that their health is not good, that they have to be somewhere early in the morning, or that they are afraid of catching “that disease which results from over-enjoyment.”

Rith and his friends usually carry condoms with them in Phnom Penh. They are aware, though, that when they go to the countryside condoms will be more difficult to come by. This causes a dilemma: Rith wants to protect himself, but rural people “might have the idea that men who have condoms with them must be going to seek sex service for sure.” Rith says that even when he feels like he will have sex outside Phnom Penh, he’s still afraid of “those people’s words since they don’t understand us and simply think we’re bad people.” For this reason, he doesn’t dare carry condoms with him when he goes to the countryside.

Rith and his friends have all received multiple trainings on HIV prevention and say they are aware of the danger from having many partners. They all say they use condoms every time with casual partners but some still refuse to do so with sweethearts, though Rith tries to convince them that it’s important in order to protect their wives and children.

Sok is a 30-year-old cyclo (rickshaw) driver. He is married. The men in Sok’s group are other cyclo drivers and laborers.

Sok gathers with two or three friends in the early evening, after finishing his driving duties for the day. When it’s starting to get dark and he feels like people will stop hiring his cyclo, he says to his friends nearby, “Let’s go have one or two glasses.” They chat about whether they have enough money for drinking and sex, and, if they do, they go to Orussey Market to drink and eat.

If Sok’s friends invite him out for an evening but he doesn’t want to go for sex, he’ll tell them he’s not feeling well. He knows that if he starts the night drinking together, he’ll definitely go for sex later. In cases like this, Sok says his friends try to convince him because if all members of the group don’t agree, none will go. Sometimes they are able to convince Sok and it causes him stress to try to balance the wishes of his group, whom he’s known for a long time, and his family, whom he doesn’t want to hurt. Usually, Sok says, if he doesn’t want to go out, he’s able to refuse even when they threaten to stop being his friend.

A few times per week Sok gathers with his friends to chat and drink some palm wine or, if they have enough money, beer, but he usually only goes out for the whole evening and to have sex on a weekend night near the beginning of the month, after he and his friends have received their salaries, which they call “winning the lottery.” Sok and his friends gather to eat, drink, and chat in order to relax from the workday. They are exhausted and they eat to regain their strength and ease their aching backs. Drinking makes them feel a little better and makes it easier to fall asleep.

Sok texts his friends to let them know he wants to get together. Not all of his friends have phones like Sok does; these men call him to set a meeting time and place. He tells them he wants to go for a “transfusion” when he wants to get together to drink, and “to change the oil” when he has enough money to pay for sex.

When Sok gets drunk, he starts to focus on the women around him and his mind becomes glued to the idea of sex. When a girl in a short skirt walks past, he says to his friends, “Oh motherfucker, her ass is very big.” This gets them aroused and they go to find sex partners.

Before he got married, and when he had enough money, Sok went for sex several times a week. But now he worries about the effects on his health: “I heard a doctor say having sex many times makes people grow old very fast.” He likes to have sex with many different women because “a man should not eat sour soup many days in a row; one should try different foods.”

In Sok’s group they take turns paying for the evening’s activities. After eating and drinking enough to be a bit drunk, Sok and his friends ride two or three on a motorcycle to a brothel in Tuol Kork or sometimes Wat Phnom. They choose the place based on the price, which is usually 5,000 riel to have sex one time. Sometimes, if he is still unsatisfied after sex, he goes to another brothel and chooses another woman.

He does not worry about having sex with many women because he has condoms to protect himself. He uses two or even three if his sex partner seems unsafe. Sok has seen many printed IEC materials, but even before he saw them, he knew about STIs and HIV, having seen many of his friends suffer from an STI that caused them to have bad smelling discharge seven days after going for sex. But, nowadays, Sok says that condom information is widely spread so that everyone he knows has a clear idea about the advantages of condoms. Sok often tells his friends, “Use condoms to protect yourselves because if you’re infected by those diseases, it will be incurable and you will die for sure.”

There is one man that Sok knows, another cyclo driver, who says he never uses condoms. That man usually goes for sex several times a week by himself, finding women in the park or fruit sellers. Sok thinks it’s amazing that this guy hasn’t gotten a disease yet. He’s proud and defiant about never having used condoms.

Most of Sok’s friends rely on their sex partners or the brothels to provide them because they fear being caught with a condom in the pocket and being thought of as a bad guy.

Sok almost always carries condoms from the start of the evening and says he won’t have sex without one. One night, Sok felt the urge to have sex. But the girl told him that she didn’t have any condoms. Sok wouldn’t have sex without them and the woman wanted Sok to pay anyway. Sok says that she threatened him, so he paid her even though he didn’t get to have sex.

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