

Ambivalent Sexism: Hostility and Benevolence

What are hostile and benevolent sexism, and how do they work together to maintain gender hierarchies?

Another reason that it's often hard to see sexism is that it can be cloaked in a positive context. As we've discussed, stereotypes can include both positive and negative components, and the positive aspects can cloak the negative ones. For example, people don't usually go around saying, "I hate women. They're horrible." In fact, many sexist beliefs arise from the assumption that women (at least women who conform to traditional gender roles) are wonderful, virtuous, and warm. **Ambivalent sexism** is a term that describes the ways in which contemporary sexism includes two related but complementary components: hostility and benevolence (Glick & Fiske, 1997). **Hostile sexism** consists of negative and derogatory beliefs about girls and women. Examples of hostile sexist beliefs are that women are incompetent, unintelligent, or sexually manipulative. In contrast, **benevolent sexism** takes a positive spin, suggesting that girls and women should be treated differently than men because they are special and worthy of being cherished and in need of protection. Examples of benevolent sexist beliefs are that women are pure, maternal, or intuitive. One can say that benevolent sexism puts women on a pedestal and hostile sexism puts women in the gutter (Begun & Walls, 2015).

Hostile and benevolent sexism work together to create sexist environments (Glick & Fiske, 1997; Wood & Eagly, 2010). Hostile sexism operates by punishing women for challenging traditional gender expectations; benevolent sexism rewards women for maintaining the gender status quo. One tool for assessing people's endorsement of hostile and benevolent sexism is the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI; Glick & Fiske, 1997), and sample items for each type of sexism are shown in Table 2.4. Research with 15,000 women and men from

Benevolent sexism is based on the idea that women should be protected and cherished. Regardless of gender identity, it can be nice when people open doors for us or carry heavy objects, but benevolent sexism places women in a "less than" position in relation to men and has been shown to have detrimental effects on girls and women.



TABLE 2.4 Sample Items from the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory

Hostile Sexism	Benevolent Sexism
Many women are actually seeking special favors, such as hiring policies that favor them over men, under the guise of asking for "equality."	Women, as compared to men, tend to have a more refined sense of culture and good taste.
Most women interpret innocent remarks or acts as being sexist.	No matter how accomplished he is, a man is not truly complete as a person unless he has the love of a woman.
Most women fail to appreciate fully all that men do for them.	Every man ought to have a woman whom he adores.
Women seek to gain power by getting control over men.	A good woman should be set on a pedestal by her man.
Once a woman gets a man to commit to her, she usually tries to put him on a tight leash.	Men should be willing to sacrifice their own well-being in order to provide financially for the women in their lives.

Note. The entire Ambivalent Sexism Inventory is provided in Glick and Fiske (1997). Respondents are instructed to rate the extent to which they agree with each item using a 6-point scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*.

19 countries using the ASI showed that levels of hostile and benevolent sexism can reliably predict the status of girls and women (Glick et al., 2000). In countries with high levels of both hostile and benevolent sexism, women were found to be less likely than men to hold high-ranking government positions, receive pay equity, or have equivalent levels of education to their male counterparts.

Benevolent sexism is based in **paternalistic chivalry**, the idea that women should be protected and cherished—at least, as long as they conform to traditional gender roles. It can be appealing for many women to be put on a pedestal, and the appeal of benevolent sexism is what makes it so insidious and hard to change. However, a pedestal is a tight place to stand, and being there traps women within a narrow range of what's acceptable. Also, hostile and benevolent sexism go hand in hand. In fact, people who hold negative beliefs about women (as evidenced by hostile sexism) tend to hold positive beliefs about women who conform to traditional gender expectations (as evidenced by benevolent sexism; Glick & Fiske, 2001). Given this relationship, it can be easy to switch between hostile and benevolent sexism. This occurs, for example, when a man who cherishes his girlfriend calls her a slut after they

your turn

Students frequently ask us, "What's wrong with chivalry? Isn't it nice for men to hold doors for women and pay for dinner?" The problem isn't the act of opening a door for someone else—it's the fact that it only involves men opening doors for women. After all, how common is it for a man to open a door and stand to the side so another man can enter? How do men react when a woman opens a door for them in this way? Were you raised in a family that valued chivalry? Was it framed as men needing to be chivalrous toward women or as human beings needing to be kind? Where do you think the line falls between chivalrous behavior reflecting sexism and acting out of kindness and concern for others?

break up. It also occurs in the cases of men who worship their mothers but are very hostile to sexual women—a phenomenon known as the *Madonna/whore complex* (Tanzer, 1985; Tavis & Wade, 1984). This phenomenon stems from the fact that some men see the women they care for and respect and the women they desire as being in mutually exclusive categories, so men will engage in both benevolent and hostile sexism—but toward different women (Tavis & Wade, 1984).

Although women are likely to reject hostile sexism, they often do endorse benevolent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 2001). In fact, one study has found that, in countries where men endorse high levels of hostile sexism, women are more likely to endorse benevolent sexism (Glick et al., 2000). This may, in part, be a self-protective response (Fischer, 2006). If a woman is in danger of being persecuted because she deviates from gender norms, it would be to her advantage to internalize the importance of staying within gender norms.

People appear to differentially apply benevolent sexism across groups of women. In one online study, researchers found that primarily White participants expressed more benevolent sexism toward White women than toward Black women (McMahon & Kahn, 2016). However, when Black women were described as chaste, the participants expressed more benevolent sexism toward them. As a result, the researchers concluded that when Black women conform to traditional expectations of femininity, a possible outcome would be experiencing benevolent sexism.

Negative Outcomes of Sexism It probably seems obvious how hostile sexism is detrimental. Studies show that those who more strongly endorse hostile sexism make less favorable attributions about career women and are less likely to believe a woman's claim about sexual harassment in the workplace (Carli, 2001; Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004). Among men, hostile sexist attitudes are also associated with finding sexist jokes amusing rather than offensive, being more likely to minimize the seriousness of rape, and thinking that a woman is to blame for being raped if she was wearing revealing clothing or had too much to drink (Chapleau, Oawald, & Russell, 2007; Greenwood & Isbell, 2002; Yamawaki, 2007). In one study, hostile sexism was significantly associated with more negative evaluations of a female job candidate and with lower recommendations that she be employed as a manager (Masser & Abrams, 2004). Women and men high on hostile sexism were also likely to evaluate male candidates more favorably than female candidates.

It's often harder to see why benevolent sexism is detrimental, but it can impede women's advancement. Benevolent sexism assumes that women are in need of men's protection, an attitude that places women in a "less than" position in relation to men. Because many people see male protection as natural, and even beneficial, benevolent sexism is often not considered sexist. In fact, during the 1970s, the justification for not ratifying the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was based on benevolent sexist principles. Opponents of the ERA claimed that equality would actually disadvantage women because it

would eliminate protections that had been put in place for women (Sue, 2010). More recently, politicians have used benevolent sexism to justify limiting military women's participation in active combat by suggesting that women are weaker than or not as capable as their male counterparts, which subsequently prevents advancement of women in the military (Choma, 2016).

Also, when women are exposed to benevolent sexism, they may show increased levels of stress. In one study, a racially diverse group of women was asked to complete a challenging problem-solving task prior to being exposed to a male researcher who made either a hostile, a benevolent, or a non-sexist comment (Salomon, Burgess, & Bosson, 2015). In the benevolent condition, he said, "Girls don't like the hard section, so I'm going to go ahead and get rid of it for you. I'm willing to sacrifice a little data, so I don't make another girl upset about how hard the last section is" (p. 472). Compared to women who weren't exposed to benevolent sexism, the women who were had increased cardiovascular activity that took longer to return to baseline. This outcome indicates that the women who were exposed to benevolent sexism experienced the stress of the problem-solving task for a longer period than was true for the women who were exposed to either the hostile sexist or the non-sexist comment. In another study, women who simply witnessed a benevolent sexist act (a man offering to pick up a box for another woman) felt more self-conscious about their bodies than those who didn't witness such an act (Shepherd et al., 2011). On the basis of these findings, one can say that even witnessing benevolent sexist acts has detrimental effects.

Benevolent sexism can even interfere with women's thinking. In one study researchers examined women's brains while completing a memory task after hearing a male researcher make a benevolent sexist statement, a hostile sexist statement, or a neutral statement (Dardenne et al., 2013). When the women were exposed to the benevolent sexist statement, the brain regions associated with stopping intrusive thoughts (e.g., bilateral, dorsolateral, prefrontal, and anterior cingulate cortex) reacted. This finding indicates that those in the benevolent sexism condition shifted attention from the task to block out intrusive thoughts. Since this wasn't true for

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Sexism and Violence

In 2014, a man killed two White women and four men of color and injured 14 others in Isla Vista, California. Following the attack, authorities uncovered a manifesto in which the attacker outlined his hatred for women and racial minority men (Magnoli, 2015).

The attack and the documents spurred a national discussion about **misogyny**, or hatred of girls and women. Some commentators saw this as reflecting a widespread problem of sexism in American culture (Hess, 2014). Other commentators, however, claimed that this was a singular act, more connected to mental illness and the problematic beliefs of a single individual. This perspective was mostly shared through Twitter via the hashtag #notallmen to claim that not *all* men are sexist. In reaction, #yesallwomen was created to offer the perspective that all women experience sexism.

The challenge is that both sides are right. Most people condemned the killings, including those who tweeted with #notallmen. They could see how harmful and unjustified these acts were and could rightly claim that not *all* men engage in overt violence. Those who posted with #yesallwomen, however, highlighted that the very fact that men can live without the threat of sexism is an example of male privilege. In this way, acts of sexism are not always overt, and privilege exists in day-to-day interactions that can appear to be harmless but, over time, can add up in potentially lethal ways (Sue, 2010).

stomach looks too big. People who self-objectify on a regular basis are considered to be self-objectifiers. Frequent self-objectification can become very distracting, and as we'll see, even occasional self-objectification can have negative consequences for the mental health of young women (e.g., Moradi & Huang, 2008). We'll cover the consequences later in this chapter, but before doing so, we'll explore why the focus on beauty matters so much in the first place.

Beauty Matters

What is normative discontent, and what are some of the consequences of not conforming to society's version of attractiveness?

The objectifying gaze is not value neutral. It implies that there are good bodies and bad bodies, and that beauty matters. But inevitably, most women are unable to live up to society's standards of beauty. Dove stated that it launched its Campaign for Real Beauty after commissioning a study in which only 2% of female respondents selected the word *beautiful* to describe themselves (Etcoff, Orbach, Scott, & D'Agostino, 2004; see Table 6.1). Because of research findings like this, women have been described as living in a continual state of

TABLE 6.1 Adjectives Women Would Be Most Comfortable Using to Describe Their Appearance

Adjective	Endorsement Rate
<i>natural</i>	31%
<i>average</i>	25%
<i>attractive</i>	9%
<i>feminine</i>	8%
<i>cute</i>	7%
<i>good-looking</i>	7%
<i>pretty</i>	5%
<i>beautiful</i>	2%
<i>sexy</i>	1%
<i>sophisticated</i>	1%
<i>stunning</i>	1%
<i>gorgeous</i>	0%

Note. Data from Etcoff et al. (2004).

body dissatisfaction, meaning that they don't feel comfortable or satisfied with their physical appearance. Several studies have found that approximately half of girls and women are dissatisfied with their bodies, and most want to be thinner (Bearman, Presnell, Martinez, & Stice, 2006; Smolak, 2012; Tantleff-Dunn, Barnes, & Larose, 2011). In fact, a survey of over 9,000 women indicated that 89% of respondents were dissatisfied with their bodies in terms of weight, and 84% wanted to be thinner (Swami, Tran, Stieger, Voracek, & The YouBeauty.com Team, 2015).

Body dissatisfaction has the potential to be a lifelong issue for women, as it has been found in girls as young as 5 years of age (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2005) and in women as old as 70 (Mangweth-Matzek et al., 2006). The phenomenon of girls and women being dissatisfied with their bodies has been referred to as a **normative discontent** (Rodin, Silberstein, & Streigel-Moore, 1984; Tantleff-Dunn et al., 2011), meaning that the normal state for girls and women with respect to their bodies is to feel unhappy or dissatisfied. Of course, normative discontent among women is essential to the bottom line of the multi-billion-dollar beauty industry. A huge part of that economic sector is driven by convincing women that they must be beautiful to be happy and by promoting standards of beauty that are almost impossible to achieve.

The popularity of the Dove campaign, and the fact that diet supplements, makeup, and other beauty products are multi-billion-dollar industries, reveal just how enormously beauty matters to girls and women in our society. However, it isn't simply an issue of vanity. In our society, girls and women are constantly evaluated by the extent to which they meet beauty standards. For example, research shows that people assume that those who are beautiful are also good (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972; Langlois et al., 2000). Moreover, many girls and women assume that their lives will be better if they more closely conform to beauty standards (Engeln-Maddox, 2006). There may be some truth to this assumption: In one study, researchers found that attractive children and adults were treated more positively by others than unattractive ones were (Langlois et al., 2000). Other studies have shown that women who don't conform to beauty ideals are often the targets of ridicule and shaming (e.g., Chrisler, 2012) and may have a more difficult time getting hired and promoted at work (Fiske, Bersoff, Borgida, Deaux, & Heilman, 1991).

Being overweight, in particular, can be problematic, as higher-weight individuals are more likely to face discrimination in many contexts, including education, health-care settings, employment, and relationships (e.g., Burmeister, Kiefler, Carls, & Musher-Eizenman, 2013; Carr & Friedman, 2005; Chen & Brown, 2005; Han, Norton, & Stearns, 2009). Women, more so than men, are likely to be targets of fat shaming (Chrisler, 2012). It's also important to recognize that fatness can be related to poverty (Rothblum, 2011). Whereas eating healthy meals and staying fit often involve spending a fair amount of money, high-caloric, processed foods with low nutritional value are cheap

(Drewnowski & Specter, 2004). A dollar can buy 1,200 calories of potato chips, for example, as compared to only 250 calories of vegetables or 170 calories of fresh fruit (Townsend, Grant, Monsivais, Keim, & Drewnowski, 2009). Gym memberships and workout videos are also costly, and even informal exercising requires time and a space to do it in.

Further, while poverty may cause fatness, there's evidence that the opposite may also be true (Ernsberger, 2009). In contemporary society, size discrimination is so great that fatness can actually lead to downward social mobility (Rothblum, 2011). In most places in the United States, for example, it is legal to discriminate based on weight. Law professor Paul Campos (2004) has argued that fat prejudice is just a modern way to discriminate without being openly sexist, racist, or classist. This type of discrimination perpetuates the *myth of transformation*—the widespread belief that weight loss will result in increased economic and interpersonal gains (Striegel-Moore & Franco, 2002).

Beyond norms of thinness, violations of any beauty norms can be problematic. In one study, when researchers showed participants a picture of a woman with leg and underarm hair, the participants rated her not only as less attractive but also as less intelligent, less happy, and less sociable than the same woman pictured without body hair (Basow & Braman, 1998). Women of color face the added expectation that they conform to White standards of beauty. For example, sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (1990) noted that Black women may encounter barriers in the workforce if they wear their hair "natural" (i.e., not straightened). We'll return to the topic of racialized standards of beauty in the next section.

To complicate matters, beauty is a double-edged sword because women can also be judged negatively if they seem too beautiful or focus too much on their appearance (Heilman & Stopeck, 1985; Vaillancourt & Sharma, 2011). In fact, women have been legally fired for being too beautiful. For example, a dental assistant in Iowa was fired because her boss felt she was attractive enough to be a threat to his marriage, as he was tempted to have an affair with her (Kimmel, 2013). When denying her appeal, the Iowa Supreme Court ruled that she

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The Selfie

What is the potential effect of social media on young women's tendency to engage in self-objectification? For many individuals, a large part of interacting on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter is the taking and posting of selfies. This practice illustrates how young women tend to view their bodies from an observer's perspective. Instead of wondering how they look or having to catch a glimpse of themselves in a mirror, they can take a selfie and immediately go from inhabiting their body to observing it. While there's not yet a lot of research on this topic, some studies indicate that higher levels of selfie posting are related to higher levels of body dissatisfaction and greater internalization of the thin ideal among girls (Cohen, Newton-John, & Slater, 2018; McLean, Paxton, Wertheim, & Masters, 2015). Moreover, body concerns are greater for those who edit their selfies before posting in an effort to "improve" their appearance. In contrast, other research has shown that high body satisfaction is actually related to selfie posting, in part so girls and women can show how satisfied they are with their appearance (Ridgway & Clayton, 2016).

No matter what your gender identification is, do you take selfies? How often, and in what situations? Do you ever edit your selfies? If so, in what ways—and why? If not, why not? How do you feel about selfies in general and yours in particular?

could “be lawfully terminated simply because the boss views the employee as an irresistible attraction” (para. 3).

So there are negative consequences for not conforming to beauty norms, but there are also negative consequences for conforming to those norms. This double bind means that some women are likely to spend a great deal of time thinking about how they look, evaluating their bodies, and feeling depressed if they decide their bodies don’t live up to society’s standards. Furthermore, to the extent that women spend time, money, and energy enhancing their beauty, they don’t have that time, money, or energy to do other things.

Beauty Norms

What are some dominant beauty norms, and how does culture impact these norms?

What does it mean to be beautiful? The term means different things to different people and can differ across cultures and time frames. More generally, though, **beauty norms** are shared standards for attractiveness, whether implicitly or explicitly stated, that are held by members of a given social group. Sometimes these standards are taught explicitly by being stated outright—for example, young girls may be told to brush their hair before leaving the house. At other times, these standards are taught implicitly—they’re never clearly stated, but girls figure them out from cues in their environment and from seeing how others behave. For example, girls might learn that straight hair is beautiful because they see other women using flat irons in a locker room (or that curly hair is beautiful because they see others using curling irons). Like other social norms, these standards convey information about what is accepted, expected, and valued, and these are generally well known and fairly uniform within a given group (Zones, 2000). Would you say, for example, that Beyoncé is an attractive woman? Some people may find her somewhat more or less appealing, but most would probably admit that she’s beautiful.

Beautiful = Racialized

A serious limitation of research on beauty is that not all beauty norms have received equal attention. The vast majority of studies on body image and body satisfaction have used samples consisting primarily of White women and have been conducted mostly by White researchers (Striegel-Moore & Smolak, 2000). Therefore, the results may only reflect patterns among and concerns of White women. Many studies also use White women as a comparison group,



Many women report dissatisfaction with or concern about the appearance of their vulva. Because most women don't see many vulvas, some artists have undertaken projects to raise awareness about the diversity of vulvas. This portion of a work by Suzanna Scott uses artfully arranged linings from coin purses as proxies for vulvas.

and/or more symmetrical (labioplasty or labiaplasty; Braun, 2009, 2010). The desire to undergo these procedures often arises from beliefs that a "tight" vagina is more desirable than a "loose" vagina, that this can increase sexual pleasure for both women and men (Braun & Kitzinger, 2001), and that the appearance of one's labia is unattractive and abnormal (Braun, 2010; McDougall, 2013). However, just as with all other aspects of our bodies, there's great variation from individual to individual. Because most women see very few vulvas, they aren't aware of the diversity of appearance, and media images—often in porn—tend to show a relatively hairless vulva with small, symmetrical labia (McDougall, 2013). This issue has inspired art projects, books, and educational websites showing diverse images of vulvas.

Sexualization: Selling Women's Bodies

How does the sexualization of women manifest at both societal and personal levels?

So far, we've learned that women receive relatively little information about sex and sexuality, they're often expected to prioritize their partner's pleasure over their own, and they may not be enjoying their sexual experiences. While women aren't expected to be particularly focused on sex or be very sexual, they are typically encouraged to be sexy. Essentially, they're supposed to be sexual objects rather than active sexual beings, and many women internalize this idea. Another way of saying this is that women are sexualized. **Sexualization** occurs when sexuality is imposed on others, when people are regarded as sex objects, and/or when their value is reduced to their sexual appeal or sexual behavior (American Psychological Association Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls, 2007). Objectification is understood as one component of sexualization, and like objectification, sexualization is both ever-present and highly problematic.

As we saw in Chapter 6, commercial media objectify women's bodies in order to sell products. The same is true with sexualization. If you turn on the television or open a magazine, you're likely to quickly encounter a sexualized image of a woman (Gill, 2003). You may have heard that "sex sells." Research indicates, however, that people are actually less likely to remember products when the marketing is paired with sex (or violence; Bushman, 2005, 2007; Bushman & Bonacci, 2002). Given these findings, sex might be attracting attention, but it's

not actually selling products. These types of sexualized ads could be understood as selling a limited view of women's sexuality, however.

On this page, you see a typical advertisement featuring a woman. Sexuality is a key aspect of this ad, as the nearly naked woman is shown on a bed with mussed sheets. But she's not active. She's lying passively in the middle of the bed, curled up in a pose indicating a lack of power. In some other ads, women are depicted in more sexually agentic ways. For example, they may beckon to men or look as though they are the ones seducing their (male) partners. Some people might consider a more active portrayal of women's sexuality to be empowering, but the woman's sexuality would still be serving to sell a product. Moreover, that type of ad conveys the idea that women can use their sexuality as a way to have power (often over men). Additionally, like ads in general, the women in most sexualized ads are typically thin, young, White, heterosexual, and lacking apparent disabilities. Such images convey a narrow view of sexuality and a narrow array of women who can enact it (Gill, 2009).

We do see (some) other women in media, but even then, the portrayals of sexuality are limited. For example, Black women are more likely to be portrayed as passively sexual rather than as actively expressing their sexuality (Gill, 2009). Black women are also often portrayed in hypersexual ways, in line with the Jezebel stereotype discussed in Chapter 2 (Bounds Littlefield, 2008; Watson, Robinson, Dispenza, & Nazari, 2012). Similarly, many Asian women are portrayed as hypersexualized, often in the context of being sex workers (Shimizu, 2007). The "hot lesbian" stereotype is a slightly different take on the sexualized (and sexual) woman (Gill, 2008, p. 49; Gill, 2009). This lesbian conforms to traditional (i.e., heterosexual) standards of beauty and is typically depicted as a target for male attention. She's usually portrayed touching or kissing another woman, but with the intent of sexually arousing men—in the show, the audience, or both. Arousing men is not, typically, a goal for lesbians. However, women enjoying sex without men isn't part of our culture's dominant sexual script (discussed earlier in this chapter). Essentially, we have performative lesbianism joining performative bisexuality.

Transgender women, in particular, are depicted in documentaries and movies with a high number of close-up shots of body parts. Even in shows that are trans-positive, like *Transamerica*, there's a tendency to highlight "fetishized, sexualized body parts" that reflect a narrow perspective on femininity—such as showing feet with high heels or hands with bright nail polish (Addams, 2009, para. 4). Further, when transgender celebrities are interviewed, questions often focus on



This ad shows a woman in a passively sexualized pose. How could it be redesigned to convey the woman's sexuality in an active or agentic way?

their genitals rather than on more meaningful aspects of their lives (Mock, 2014). For example, the trans actress Laverne Cox was asked by daytime talk show host Wendy Williams if she had breast implants and was later pushed by show host and news anchor Katie Couric to discuss her “private parts.” Cox responded by saying, “I do feel there is a preoccupation with my private parts. The preoccupation with transition and surgery objectifies trans people. And then we don’t get to really deal with the real lived experiences” (McDonough, 2014, para. 3).

Sex Work

Women’s sexuality is more directly commoditized through sex work. **Sex work** is an umbrella term that refers to the exchange of sexual services, performances, or products for compensation (Gerassi, 2015; Weitzer, 2010). This can include in-person sexual interactions such as oral sex or sexual intercourse, often referred to as prostitution. It can also include pornography, stripping, webcam models, and the like. Although prostitution is legal in some parts of the world—most notably in much of Europe and South America, Canada, and Mexico (<http://chartsbin.com/view/snb>)—prostitution, and even legal forms of sex work, are widely considered to be immoral (Weitzer, 2007). As such, it’s hard to know how many women, and men, are involved with sex work because it’s not something most people talk about openly.

Sex work is big business. One study of the illegal commercial sex economy in just eight U.S. cities in 2007 estimated that it generated between \$39.9 and \$290 million (Dank et al., 2014). When the scope is broadened to include pornography, researchers identify a \$10–\$12 billion industry in the United States and a \$97 billion industry worldwide (Morris, 2015). These estimates probably don’t include stripping, webcam work, and myriad other forms of sex work. Moreover, the returns for women who engage in sex work aren’t always equitable. In one study of Black and Latinx dancers, researchers found that Black and dark-skinned Latinx women received less money than White or lighter-skinned Latinx women for their erotic services (Brooks, 2010). This was attributed to marginalization due to patrons’ racialized stereotypes of such women being hypersexual or aggressive.

Although some women do watch pornography (Hald, Seaman, & Linz, 2014) and visit strip clubs (Montemurro, Bloom, & Madell, 2003; Wosick-Correa & Joseph, 2008), this sort of sex work disproportionately provides sexual and entertainment services to men (Weitzer, 2010). As discussed in the Empowering or Oppressing feature, some women choose to engage in sex work, but for others it’s a “choice” of last resort. For example, pervasive workplace discrimination can make sex work the most viable option for transgender women to support themselves (Nadal, Davidoff, & Fujii-Doe, 2014). In one study of 48 transgender women of color who were sex workers, researchers found that although there

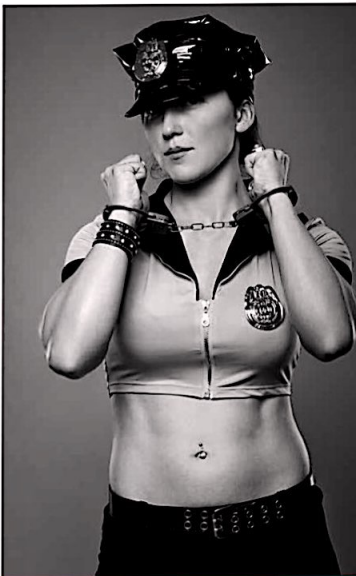
were multiple reasons for doing sex work, nearly all of them thought their gender identity, race/ethnicity, class, and appearance contributed to their involvement in the work (Sausa, Keatley, & Operario, 2007). Further, some women, both in the United States and worldwide, are forced into sex work through human trafficking, and often this begins when they are girls (Gerassi, 2015). We'll return to this topic in Chapter 12.

The fact that sex work is often illegal (and even when legal, is disapproved of) means that it's a very dangerous industry. For example, sex work can expose people to sexually transmitted diseases, drug use, and incarceration (Hoffman, 2014). Transgender women, in particular, report a high level of physical abuse from law enforcement as a result of working in the sex industry (Nadal et al., 2014). Racism also influences experiences with both sex work and violence. For example, Black sex workers report high levels of harassment from law enforcement (Porter & Bonilla, 2000; Raphael & Shapiro, 2004). According to one study, Black women in Brooklyn, New York, make up about one third of the total population, but 94% of charges on the offense of "loitering for the purposes of prostitution" were against Black women (Berlatsky, 2014).

Enjoying Sexualization and Self-Sexualization

Despite the negative aspects of a culture that sexualizes women and profits from their sexuality, some women report enjoying aspects of this and find empowerment through embracing their sexuality in public ways (Levy, 2005). For example, a woman may wear a push-up bra and high heels because it makes her feel sexy and powerful. Or she may put on a highly sexualized Halloween costume (e.g., sexy nurse, sexy cat) and, rather than feeling oppressed, see it as a fun, sexy, and empowered choice. Engaging in these types of behaviors is known as **self-sexualization**.

Some psychologists have questioned whether the perceived empowerment that women may associate with self-sexualization is as positive as it may seem on the surface (Lamb, 2010a; Peterson, 2010). After all, our culture conveys messages that sexualized behaviors are the norm for women and will lead to positive outcomes (Murnen & Smolak, 2012), including a sense of empowerment (Tolman, 2012). Given this, however, the underlying question is whether women engage in



A common trend among women's Halloween costumes is that they're designed to be "sexy"—sexy police officer, sexy nurse, sexy zombie. It's often hard to find women's costumes that aren't intentionally sexualized. Why might women want to wear these types of costumes? Why might they not?