

Constructed Value Systems Across Interpersonal Relationships

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Abstract: Increasingly hypersexual narratives in digital and physical environments have warranted the need to understand how they affect the constructed value schemes of emerging adults. The complexities of these values are first constructed in digital media, then close social networks and spaces, and finally are internalized within the self. This research begins with a survey of existing analyses. Particular attention is given to hypersexual individuals and the resulting behavior and creation of self-identity. Within sexual relationships, non-sexual relationships, and the relationship with the self, the body of existing work is understood. The research ends with a survey distributed to fifty-one individuals, aged nineteen to twenty-three years old. Along with the survey were two, one on one interviews. The results found statistical relationships between effort in friendships and wellbeing, and frequency of sexual thoughts and perceived desirability of self. Conclusions were able to be made about the threats of more sexual environments on the target group, and how these can add detrimental narratives to existing social pressures.

Introduction

The complexity of modern social environments is influencing the way people behave and feel across their different relationships. Social metanarratives in these environments include those that exist with a higher level of toxicity and detriment. Specifically, hypersexual influences are more prevalent on and offline. The higher concentration of this messaging changes the way people understand their different relationships. As a result, feelings of an individual's value are warped and

incongruent across sexual relationships, non-sexual relationships, and their relationship with the self. All these relationships are then compared across the media and entertainment consumed, the social environments interacted in, and the internalization of these places within the self. With increasing difficulty to find satisfaction and validation, research was performed to better understand the impact of hypersexual influences on youth emerging into adulthood. Including literary research, survey design, and one on one interviewing, quantifiable

and qualitative conclusions were made concerning an individual's constructed value systems across their interpersonal relationships.

Sexual Relationships

Interpersonal relationships begin with an individual's perception of others, where they belong in social narratives, and how they value their place in society. The social arena currently under evaluation for young adults has never been so large. Constant access to others is available by one-on-one connection, in person events, socially prioritized environments, online digital platforms, and social media. From romantic dates to clubs and bars, to who people choose to connect with online, there is an increasing presence of connectedness. Beyond this connectivity, there are different perceived value systems existing in each environment. Although social places are more complex, they are all similarly sexual. Specifically in media, hypersexuality has had an increasing prevalence that exists as unhealthy relationship portrayals, unhealthy behaviors of sex seeking, immediate gratification, and unrealistic fantasies. In real social environments, there is an increased sexual narrative that judges, profiles, and assumes. It also exists as warped priorities that place more value on sexual gratification. Relationships as evaluated by the individual are wrapped up in sexualization as well. This creates ties between sex and validation, promises unrealistic expectations, and reinforces feelings of fulfillment only through action with others.

Digital media, both in viewership and interaction, has become an increasingly sexual tool. In digital spaces, sex is leveraged to communicate expectations and facilitate interaction. In consumed media where the

viewer participates alone, sexuality is valuable to producers. Erotic content or erotic implied content exists in high volumes, in almost all forms of media. Across movies, television, and advertising there is a higher percentage of sexual content and better performance because of it. Increased media performance from sexual content includes higher viewership, ratings, and earnings (Reichert and Lambiase 2013, 15-18). Even across genres, the use of sex is equally used in media communications (Reichert and Lambiase 2013, 1-10). Sex exists as both high demand for consumers and producers, as more interest is generated with more sexually implicit teasing (Reichert and Lambiase 2013, 12-20). Not only is there a higher desire to view sexualized content, but there is also a higher desire to participate in sexual content in digital spaces. In all forms of relationship building, there is an overwhelming reliance on devices that connect people digitally (Turban et al. 2017, 96-97; Bergdall et al. 2012, 571-575). When it specifically comes to sex seeking, the majority of people rely on mobile devices (Bergdall et al. 2012, 576), with almost a third of some populations using applications that exist only for sex and relationship seeking (Turban et al. 2017, 97). Beyond partner acquisition, personal devices are required for evaluation and participation in relationships. Within one youth study, every participant used a phone to communicate in, evaluate, and continue a relationship (Bergdall et al. 2012, 577-581).

The value and prevalence of digital media is evident in sexual relationships, but it is still laced with harmful social metanarratives. Media in the context of relationships, shows an unhealthy desire, acquisition, and performance of sex. There are disproportionate amounts of harmful sexual behavior portrayed in media, including

hypersexuality, objectification, degradation, and unrealistic fantasy (Reichert and Lambiase 2013, 1-34; Collins 2011, 290-298; Miller-Young 2010, 219-235). Not only are the behaviors more sexual, but they are also sexualized and in a detrimental context. This specifically addresses, not the prevalence of sex in media, but the prevalence of sexualization, erotic undertones, and harmful representations. Within media, sex is more often portrayed by female and marginalized personas, especially in situations that puts them in a lack of power or objectification (Reichert and Lambiase 2013, 34-36; Collins 2011, 290-298; Miller-Young 2010, 219-235). Men in media are consistently portrayed in power, and thus there are saturated instances of heterodominant narratives, patriarchal narratives, and hypermasculine narratives (Collins 2011, 290-298). The sexualization of characters in media is particularly impactful, because it is not the existence of sex in media that creates observable detriment. It is the enaction of marginalized groups in sexualized positions that has led to impacts on an individual's self-esteem, hypersexuality, sexual health, and more (Collins 2011, 290-298). Within our digital environments, there are more narratives that communicate damaging and harmful actions in the realm of sex. These narratives contribute to where the bodies of others are placed in an individual's perception of society.

Beyond digital environments, physical social environments contribute to an individual's constructed value schemes across their relationships. Throughout all stages of sexual relationship building, there are multiple points that social narratives enter. Many interactions are pursued off media, in spaces that are culturally identified as sex seeking. These include bars, clubs, and environments that facilitate an ephemeral

group of people for an event. There are indicators when pursuing sex that cause individuals to evaluate and rank options. Previous risqué sexual activity, multiple sexual partners, and undesirable sexual behaviors are examples of detractors from sexual pursuits (Bergdall et al. 2012, 571-581). These qualities reflect a promiscuity or lack of purity. There are also reports on the gamification of sex and ease of acquisition that has detracted from pursuing a relationship (Bergdall et al. 2012, 571-581). Often, these host traditional heterodominant structures that place men in charge of and prioritizing sex seeking (Anonymous Source #1, 2021). In these environments, the information an individual presents to others ranks their desirability. This causes themes of white, fit, and limited sexual partners to prioritize relationships, along with underlying notions of socially derived normalcy (Reichert and Lambiase 2013, 34-36; Anonymous Source #2, 2021). Social environments are also often hosts for unhealthy behavioral exhibition. Acting on hypersexual behaviors directly contributes to negative feelings of life satisfaction, shame, emotional dysregulation, and loneliness (Dhuffar, Pontes, and Griffiths 2015, 231-233).

Relationships with the individual and sexual partners are affected by internal value schemes as well. Internal sense of value influences the way people choose, interact, and empathize with their partners. Individuals who have high levels of self-identified shame are more at risk to act out on hypersexual behaviors, participate in casual sex, and form insecure attachment relationships (Dhuffar, Pontes, and Griffiths 2015, 231-232; Gilliland et al. 2015, 5-9). These internal value schemes are created out of comparisons with cultural evaluations. Acting on feelings of low self-worth is seen

with addiction to pornography, being securely attached to fantasy, inability to appraise the outcome of sexual acts, and finding validation in sexual activity (Dhuffar, Pontes, and Griffiths 2015, 233-236; Gilliland et al. 2015, 9-19). This also relates to feelings of fulfillment being tied to sexual partners and unachievable by independent means (Turban et al. 2017, 98-100). Although these reports are from those who negatively view the self, there are ties between the value schemes created within the self and the actions exhibited as a result. When trying to evaluate feelings of self-actualization and validation, especially compared to sexual relationships, there are negative consequences with low value and at risk behavior.

Non-Sexual Relationships

An individual's support system is the next layer of interpersonal relationships that influence feelings of validation. In a hypersexual system, these relationships are portrayed in media and entertainment as unfulfilling. These relationships often lack narratives of platonic love, care, and respect. Unrepresented healthy support systems allow real social relationships to prioritize sexual partners over non-sexual partners. A mindset is then preserved that contributes to a lack of nurture and attention to non-sexual relationships.

The absent role of friendships within hypersexual systems, social narratives, and sense of self contributes to a poorly constructed support system. Digitally, the lack of presence is evident in consumed and interactive media. In all genres of entertainment, there is less representation of healthy, platonic love, care, and respect (Collins 2011, 290-298). Friendships in media are often laced with masculine leads, and/or unfulfilling benefits (Gilliland et al. 2015, 1-3). Beyond digital spaces, there are

social pressures that prioritize sex, seek fulfillment through sex, and lack mutual attention from non-sexual partners. Internalized, this is evident by behaviors that desire sexual interaction in relationships and contribute to insecure support systems. Within hypersexual individuals, the ability to form meaningful, non-sexual relationships is greatly impacted; similar too is the ability to find secure feelings of attachment to non-sexual partners (Gilliland et al. 2015, 1-9). Although there is more presence and connectivity to non-sexual relationships, these support systems are often not at the forefront of an individual's constructed value schemes and attention.

Relationship with the Self

The final governing factor to an individual's interpersonal relationships is the perception and nurturing of the self. Especially in interactive digital media, the relationship with the self is met with comparisons to others, social bias to present oneself as more attractive, and opportunity to mirror the personas that exist on screen. Whether as a passive or active participant, digital environments create a comparative and hyper manicured sense of self. Manifesting in actual relationships with others, it places individuals in popular, fit, white, and other Eurocentric forms of presentation. It includes narratives that being alone is not fulfilling or possibly neurotic, and that to participate in modern society is to participate in sexual activity. Whether online or offline, these environments and behaviors contribute to invalidation and poor self-actualization. It causes a sense of self that becomes reliant on unhealthy feelings, including poor mental health, obsession, and aggressive attention to physical beauty.

Viewing and interacting with different relationships in media influence

relationships with the self. Especially on social driven platforms, there are direct comparisons that allow visible and quantifiable ranks between the self and others. Within these ranks there is still an overarching narrative that sexual content, whether implicit or explicit, generates more interaction (Smith et al. 2016, 501-515). Beyond this, when using digital platforms to interact with others, confirmations in metrics and communications reward dangerous behavior. Those who engage in sexually explicit websites and sexual messaging are more at risk for sexual promiscuity, infidelity, and infection (Smith et al. 2016, 501-515). Although there isn't a clear causal relationship, there are ties between the sexual health and wellbeing of an individual and their consumed media. Because it's normal to mirror the personas on screen, and these personas are becoming more sexual, there are threats to an individual's safety. Not only is this impacting the relationship people have with themselves, but also creates public health risks as this behavior is normalized and/or spread to others in their network (Smith et al. 2016, 501-515).

Relationships with the self are often in context to socially derived ranks. Getting more attention, receiving compliments, and watching others interact in physical spaces all contribute to a value system of the self being derived by others. In sexually competitive environments, this puts an individual's self-efficacy, sexual satisfaction, and feeling of pride at the dispense of their peers. Intense feelings of sexual performance can come from both positive and negative associations. Those who understand sexual interaction as daunting, unbeneficial, and negatively associated with the self can develop hypersexual behavior and a lack of sexual efficacy (Pachankis et al. 2014, 669-683). Similarly, those who are rewarded for

socially sexual behavior are more at risk for infection, shame, and loss of self-control (Pachankis et al. 2014, 670-672). Within both feelings towards sexual activity, there are consequences that can harm the individual.

Finally, the relationship people have with themselves, evaluated by themselves, are most at risk. When influences from sexual relationships and non-sexual relationships impound the self, there are often conflicting and non-conversional value systems. Beyond this, these influences are generated from a complex social setting that includes digital and physical landscapes. Within the context of an increasing hypersexual narrative, there are an abundance of indicators presented to an individual that rank their value. In a hypersexual environment, there is witness to a loss of self-control, a loss of self-efficacy, and a loss of emotional wellbeing (Pachankis et al. 2014, 675-680; Dhuffar, Pontes, and Griffiths 2015, 231-237; Turban et al. 2017, 98-100). Especially within the self, hypersexuality can cause a disruption in the ability to associate control. Feelings and behaviors are attributed to external sources, and what's internalized is a sense of shame related to an inability to control, affect, or stop these actions (Pachankis et al. 2014, 670-680). The increasing danger of presenting hypersexual influences to the self, is that there is considerable association with poor mental health and poor feelings of wellbeing (Pachankis et al. 2014, 675-680). Although consuming hypersexual content does not solidify hypersexuality, nor do these effects directly threaten those who aren't hypersexual, there are huge risks if self-efficacy slips, feelings of doubt are harbored, or sexuality becomes out of control. The relationship with the self is the most fragile of all, and it is the most internalized when it comes to feelings that are difficult to share with others. This makes complex and

increasingly sexual environments coded with external narratives as an individual evaluates their sense of self.

Methodology

The underlying reason for the executed data collection was to observe the impacts of hypersexual influences on contemporary relationships of emerging adults. Emerging adults in this collection were specifically those whose social groups recently began participating in sexual activity. To better understand the relationships they experience, two methods of data collection were used. A survey questionnaire was used for quantifiable evidence towards hypersexual influences. The second form of research included interviews with two persons. This led to more open-ended and free flowing qualitative observation. The goal of the two methods was to include both unstructured and structured data for a well-rounded analysis.

The survey questionnaire was a digital form that asked eleven questions along with demographic information. The survey design started with an open-ended question to generate interest. It continued with multiple choice questions, which were then followed by semantic differential ratings scales. These questions and scales inquired about sexual activity and thoughts, consumed media channels, and feelings of satisfaction across an individual's relationships. The survey ended with demographic information and the option to continue with one-on-one interviews. The survey questionnaire was entirely anonymous and voluntary, where participation was highly encouraged with

consideration to respondents' well-being. It was distributed across the United States to fifty-one respondents in total, aged between nineteen to twenty-three years old. The distribution included word of mouth, sharing on social media, and individual requests from both the researcher and respondents.

Of the respondents who indicated interest in one-on-one interviews, two respondents were chosen at random to continue. The respondents were chosen based on availability to schedule interviews. Because of the pool of applicants being generated from the survey questionnaire, it included the same demographic of individuals who participated in the survey. The two respondents each had thirty minute long, virtual interviews. These interviews were one-on-one with the researcher and included five to ten open ended questions about their perceptions on sex, their relationships, and their feelings of well-being. They were encouraged to conduct the interview in a safe space, where they felt comfortable and away from distractions. The interview ended by questioning the interviewee if they'd like to contribute anything else that they didn't get the opportunity to already say. The identity of the individuals was kept confidential between the interviewer and interviewee. This assured a safer space to talk about personal topics and helped preserve confidentiality and security; however, interviewee responses were still transcribed.

Discussion

To better understand the results from the data collection, multiple tests were

conducted to measure feelings of wellbeing across relationships and different influences. One tail t-tests were conducted to measure if there was an overall significant satisfaction with a respondent's sex life, relationships, or sense of well-being. Two tail t-tests were conducted to measure statistical significance between sexual status and well-being, sexual status and healthy relationships, and other metrics with perceptions of the self. A final regression analysis was performed to test statistical significance of sexual satisfaction and well-being across gender, sexuality, relationship status, and amount of sexual activity.

Upon analysis of the questionnaire responses, there were multiple statistically significant relationships. Only those of statistical significance were included in this report. There were significant measures that were excluded which were of those who are sexually active and the amount of sexual intercourse had, those in relationships and the amount of sexual intercourse had, and those in relationships who are sexually active. These were excluded due to their correlating and self-confirming nature. Each test was conducted with an alpha of 0.05 and assuming equal variance because the number of samples collected was over N=30.

Of the one tail t-tests conducted across the semantic differential rating scales, the only significant relationship was the overall feeling towards a respondent's friendships. Establishing a null hypothesis that there was no statistical average satisfaction, it was then rejected with a reported p value of 3.50E-13 (Table 1). Overall, on a scale of 1 being unsatisfactory to 5 being satisfactory, there

was a mean satisfaction of 4.14 (Table 1). Among the respondents, there was an overall feeling of satisfaction towards their friendships.

Upon a two tail t-test between overall feeling of satisfaction towards friendships and a respondent's sexual status, it was found that those that are sexually active were less happy with their friendships. A null hypothesis stated that there was no statistical difference between sexual activity and satisfaction towards friendships. This was rejected because of the reported p value of 0.028 (Table 2). The alternative hypothesis was then accepted, that stated there was a

	Overall Feeling	Middle of Scale
Mean	4.137	3
Variance	0.721	
Observations	51	
Pooled Variance	0.721	
T Stat	9.566	
P(T<=t) one-tail	3.50E-13	

Table 1. One tail t-test: Overall feeling towards friendships (1: unsatisfactory – 5: satisfactory)

	X1	X2
Mean	4.474	3.938
Variance	0.263	0.899
Observations	19	32
Pooled Variance	0.666	
T Stat	2.269	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.0277	

Table 2. Two tail t-test: Overall feeling towards friendships (1: unsatisfactory – 5: satisfactory). X1: not sexually active; X2: sexually active.

statistical difference between sexual activity and satisfaction of friendships, with those that were sexually inactive were more satisfied in their friendships.

Two t-tests were statistically significant among straight and queer identifying respondents. Within the analysis, there was statistical significance that queer identifying respondents had more sexual intercourse over the past year and put more effort into their friendships. These were both accepted because of corresponding p values of 0.043 (Table3) and 0.049 (Table 4).

	X1	X2
Mean	2.846	2.12
Variance	1.415	1.693
Observations	26	25
Pooled Variance	1.552	
T Stat	2.081	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.0427	

Table 3. Two tail t-test: How much sexual intercourse in past year (1: 0 times a month - 5: 7+)

	X1	X2
Mean	2.692	3.2
Variance	0.782	0.833
Observations	26	25
Pooled Variance	0.807	
T Stat	-2.018	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.0491	

Table 4. Two tail t-test: How much mutual effort is put into friendships (1: more effort from self - 5: less effort from self). X1: queer identifying; X2: straight.

Finally, regression analyses were conducted across multiple scales included in the questionnaire. Those that were

statistically significant included how desirable a respondent ranked themselves versus how often they had thoughts of sexual activity, and a respondent's overall feeling towards their wellbeing versus how much mutual effort is put into their friendships. For the first regression, a p value of 0.0013 allowed a rejection of the null hypothesis (Table 5). This meant that there was statistical significance between how much a respondent thought about sexual intercourse and how desirable they thought they would be ranked by their peers. Thus, the more frequent a respondent thought about sexual intercourse, the more desirable they thought their peers would rank them. For the second regression, a p value of 0.011 allowed a rejection of the null hypothesis (Table 6). This meant that there was statistical significance between a respondent's overall feeling towards their wellbeing and how much mutual effort was put into their friendships. Thus, the more effort that was put by others into friendships, the more satisfied a respondent was with their wellbeing. This explained that those who think they put more effort into their friendships are less satisfied with their wellbeing.

Limitations

This research was conducted with limitations due to the nature of the researcher, the nature of cited articles, and the population of respondents to the survey questionnaire. Firstly, this research was performed by an individual researcher and their own investigation. This potentially allows for high levels of confirmation bias, ignorance of unknown variables, and lack of accountability from outside support and

	Coefficient	Standard Error	T Stat	P-value
Intercept	0.848	0.426	1.992	0.0520
X1	0.530	0.128	4.146	0.0001

Table 5. Regression: How desirable if evaluated by others (1: less desirable than others - 5: more desirable than others). X1: How often thought about having sexual intercourse (1: never - 5: several times a day).

	Coefficient	Standard Error	T Stat	P-value
Intercept	2.428	0.421	5.769	5.304E-07
X1	0.361	0.137	2.645	0.0110

Table 6. Regression: Overall feeling towards wellbeing (1: unsatisfactory - 5: satisfactory). X1: How much mutual effort is put into friendships (1: more effort from self - 5: less effort from self).

critique. For example, racial identity was excluded from the survey questionnaire; this was due to the lack of understanding of how value schemes and sexuality particularly affect minority groups. Upon analysis of existing research and interview respondents, women, BIPOC, and male to male relationships are particularly affected by sexualization. Further study must be done to understand the extent to which gender, race, sexuality, and other marginalized qualifiers relate to hypersexual influences.

Although this research showed significant correlations and effects of hypersexuality on individuals, much of the research was conducted on specific populations. Those populations included women, racial minorities, male to male relationships, and veterans. Much of the existing research has been conducted on those only in treatment or self-diagnosed with hypersexuality. On top of this, analysis was pulled from research on those who are not within this study's age

group. The intention of including this research was to understand the implications of hypersexuality. Currently, there is a lack of existing research on if hypersexual influences affect the majority of the population undiagnosed and asymptomatic.

Finally, the respondents of this survey only included a small sample of the intended target population. Although samples varied across age, gender, sexuality, and location, there is large potential that many groups were unrepresented in the survey. For example, many respondents wrote of positive relationships with their family, the church, and their community. These support groups were left out of the study in this survey and were potentially lacking representation in the small sample size. A survey with a larger sample size, more college universities, and those not within higher education should be conducted to get a more accurate understanding of these relationships.

Conclusion

As a result of this research, the constructed value schemes across interpersonal relationships were better understood. These value schemes were analyzed under the context of hypersexual influences towards a generation of young adults, specifically surveying those between nineteen to twenty-three years old. From research, the relationship with sexual partners, relationship with non-sexual partners, and relationship with the self was analyzed. Each relationship considered the effect of media, social environments, and internalizations. The conclusions of this research found that hypersexuality can cause disjointed and detrimental value schemes across an individual's relationships. These value schemes can cause poor behavior and poor constructions of self-identity. Those particularly affected are more at risk for poor feelings of self, lack of control, sexual infection, and addiction or obsession with unhealthy desires. From the conducted research, including a survey questionnaire and personal interviews, multiple conclusions were significant. Particularly, friendships were overall satisfactory to respondents, but differed according to how much perceived mutual effort is put into these friendships. On top of this, the frequency of thoughts about sexual intercourse related to how desirable respondents perceived themselves compared to others.

The biggest importance of this research was to stress the dangers of the increasingly hypersexual environments. This research does not prove, conclude, or exist to make

any claims of hypersexual influences on the behavior and feelings of individuals. What it does accomplish, is pointing out the potential risk of hypersexuality in shared environments. With digital and social environments becoming more sexual, there are high dangers if they become associated with poor feelings of self-worth, value, and well-being. There is a huge danger to public health if there is not a positive, nurturing, responsible, and self-assured narrative included in sex related environments. It is a shared role to protect physical and digital environments from harmful and toxic narratives that are traditionally carried with sex.

This research should not cynically interpret the more sexual influences that are at play. Instead, it makes a case for how important it is to have positive feelings of self in any relationship. Strong feelings of sexuality, self-efficacy, and value should be cherished with huge importance. The most crucial thing to come out of this research is the demand for self-assurance. Being happy, confident, and full loving of the self is a healthy practice and easily forgotten. Often, dangers arise out of insecurity, lack of self-assurance, and external feelings of pressure. The goal of this research should be to encourage a nurturing of the self. Pride of an individual's actions and relationships is positive whether sexual or not. There is no right or wrong, no condemnation of sex or otherwise, no jury on the nature of media and sexualized public spaces. There is, however, a conscious nurturing and love of the self. The value schemes constructed out of digital and physical spaces vary across relationships,

and it is the job of the individual to find healthy metrics and comparisons from them.

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