



A Hermeneutic Inquiry into Intragender Hypersexualization: A Study of Interpersonal Experiences and Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

In a society where perceptions of sexuality often shape identity and relationships, hypersexualization within same-gender interactions reveal complex layers of meaning and experience. Understanding these encounters opens pathways for reflection, advocacy, and inclusive education that foster respect and emotional safety in all forms of social interaction. Through a reflective and interpretive approach, personal narratives were gathered from individuals who have experienced same-gender hypersexualization within a college community. The findings reveal that intragender hypersexualization occurs across daily interactions and is experienced through objectification, emotional discomfort, and repeated boundary violations that affect social behavior and well-being. Participants respond by becoming more cautious, normalizing, or downplaying experiences, and reinforcing personal boundaries and respect in relationships.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Hypersexualization refers to the excessive emphasis or fixation on a person's sexual attributes, behaviors, or appeal, often reducing their identity to mere physical or sexual characteristics (Latham, 2022). This phenomenon manifests in various social interactions, media portrayals, and everyday discourse, shaping how individuals perceive and engage with one another. Within a broader social context, hypersexualization can contribute to distorted understandings of self-worth, gender roles, and interpersonal boundaries (Johnson & Yu, 2023; Santoniccolo et al., 2023). When this occurs within the same gender – termed *intragender hypersexualization* – it reveals complex dynamics of attraction, power, and identity negotiation that are deeply embedded in cultural and social expectations. Such interactions often reflect internalized standards of desirability, creating spaces where individuals are both influenced by and contributors to the ongoing cycle of sexual objectification among peers (McCole & Anderson, 2025; Stegeman et al., 2025).

In recent years, the tendency to hypersexualize others has become more evident in interpersonal relationships and social exchanges. The normalization of objectifying comments, gestures, and assumptions contributes to a culture that often disregards emotional boundaries and mutual respect (Karsay et al., 2018). While hypersexualization across genders has been widely documented, *intragender hypersexualization* remains a growing and underrecognized phenomenon. Individuals may find themselves objectified or sexualized by members of their own gender, leading to experiences of discomfort, confusion, or even diminished self-concept (Fasoli et al., 2018; Pecini et al., 2023). This recurring pattern highlights an evolving social concern that requires thoughtful exploration, particularly as it challenges conventional understandings of attraction, identity, and respect in same-gender interactions.

Despite its relevance, there remains a notable gap in the literature concerning the experiences and perceptions surrounding *intragender hypersexualization*. Much of the existing research centers on heteronormative dynamics, leaving same-gender experiences underexplored and often misunderstood. This population gap limits the development of contextually grounded interventions, educational programs, and institutional policies that could address these nuanced realities (Civile & Obhi, 2016; Ward, 2016; Stegeman et al., 2025). The inquiry opens a space for understanding how *intragender hypersexualization* is experienced, interpreted, and navigated by individuals within contemporary social and cultural contexts by acknowledging this absence.

The significance of exploring these experiences lies not only in filling a research gap but also in aligning with the goals of existing legal and institutional frameworks that promote safe and respectful interactions. Anchored on the Philippine Safe Spaces Act (RA 11313), this inquiry underscores the importance of extending protection and awareness to all forms of gender-based sexual harassment, including those that occur within same-gender interactions. Institutions may better understand how *hypersexualization* unfolds within peer communities and, in turn, strengthen their educational and intervention programs by documenting these lived experiences. This contributes to a culture

of inclusivity, empathy, and accountability, ensuring that safe spaces are truly accessible to all, regardless of gender orientation or identity.

Grounded in this context, the study seeks to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of individuals who have encountered hypersexualization from those of the same gender. It aims to uncover how they make sense of these encounters, how such experiences shape their interpersonal relationships, and what meanings they attach to these moments.

Statement of the Problem

The growing visibility of hypersexualization within same-gender interactions highlights a complex issue that often goes unnoticed in everyday social settings. While much attention has been given to heterosexual dynamics of sexualization, experiences among individuals of the same gender remain less explored, leaving gaps in understanding how these encounters shape personal boundaries, identity, and social relationships. Such experiences may influence how individuals perceive themselves and others, affecting their emotional well-being and sense of safety in both private and institutional spaces. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do individuals experience hypersexualization from members of the same gender?
2. How do they interpret and make sense of these experiences in relation to their identity and interpersonal relationships?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept and Dynamics of Hypersexualization

Hypersexualization is commonly described in literature as the tendency to assign sexual meaning, value, or attention to individuals beyond appropriate or consensual contexts (Latham, 2022). It often involves focusing on physical appearance, body parts, or perceived sexual availability, rather than recognizing individuals as whole persons with complex identities. Scholars note that hypersexualization operates through language, gestures, visual cues, and social interactions, making it a subtle yet powerful social process (Johnson & Yu, 2023; McCole & Anderson, 2025). Because it is frequently embedded in everyday encounters, it can become normalized and overlooked, especially when framed as humor, admiration, or casual interaction.

Existing studies emphasize that hypersexualization is not limited to media representation but is deeply rooted in interpersonal relationships. In face-to-face interactions, it may appear through comments, jokes, or invitations that cross personal boundaries (Pecini et al., 2023). These behaviors can create discomfort, confusion, or fear, particularly when power dynamics or social expectations discourage individuals from responding directly (Fasoli et al., 2018). Over time, repeated exposure to hypersexualization may affect emotional well-being, self-esteem, and the way individuals navigate social spaces, reinforcing feelings of vulnerability and objectification (Karsay et al., 2018).

Recent literature further highlights that the effects of hypersexualization extend beyond immediate emotional reactions and influence how individuals interpret social meaning. Being repeatedly viewed through a sexual lens can

shape identity formation, interpersonal trust, and perceptions of safety (Stegeman et al., 2025). Individuals may respond by becoming more cautious, setting stricter boundaries, or avoiding certain environments altogether. These patterns suggest that hypersexualization functions not only as an individual experience but also as a broader social issue that reflects how bodies, desire, and respect are negotiated in everyday life (Calogero et al., 2021; Jiang et al., 2025).

Intragender Relations and Perceptions of Sexualization

While much of the literature on sexualization focuses on interactions between different genders, emerging studies recognize that sexualization also occurs within same-gender relationships. In intragender contexts, hypersexualization can be particularly complex, as it intersects with shared gender identities, expectations, and social roles (Santonico et al., 2023). Individuals may struggle to interpret whether certain behaviors are expressions of attraction, humor, or disrespect, which can blur boundaries and complicate responses. This ambiguity often makes intragender hypersexualization less visible and less likely to be openly discussed (Mulligan et al., 2024).

Scholars note that experiences of sexualization within the same gender can influence how individuals relate to peers and form social connections. Some individuals report becoming more guarded or selective in their interactions, while others normalize such experiences as part of social life to avoid conflict (Calogero et al., 2021; Makanadar, 2025). These responses highlight how intragender hypersexualization shapes interpersonal relationships and self-understanding, particularly in environments where discussions of same-gender attraction or misconduct remain limited (Boyer, 2022). By examining these dynamics, the literature underscores the need to better understand how intragender sexualization is experienced, interpreted, and addressed within everyday social settings.

Conceptual Framework

This inquiry is grounded on several theoretical and legal foundations that together provide a comprehensive lens for understanding intragender hypersexualization. Objectification Theory (Roberts et al., 2018; Davids et al., 2019) offers a framework for examining how individuals may internalize or resist being treated as objects of sexual desire, revealing the psychological and emotional consequences of persistent hypersexualization. Queer Theory (Acadia, 2021) expands this understanding by questioning normative structures of gender and sexuality, allowing space to interpret same-gender dynamics beyond heteronormative assumptions. Social Interactionism (Bales, 2017) further complements these perspectives by emphasizing how meaning is co-constructed through everyday interactions, highlighting the role of communication, perception, and context in shaping experiences of being hypersexualized. Collectively, these theories situate intragender hypersexualization as both an individual and social phenomenon, shaped by internalized norms and relational exchanges.

The inclusion of the Safe Spaces Act (RA 11313) strengthens this framework by providing a legal and ethical dimension that grounds the inquiry in current

Philippine policy. This law recognizes various forms of sexual harassment and promotes the creation of safe environments across public and private institutions. The study not only investigates lived experiences but also positions them within actionable structures that advocate for dignity and respect by integrating the Act with the selected theories. Objectification Theory and Queer Theory challenge existing norms and hierarchies of desire, Social Interactionism contextualizes these experiences in everyday encounters, and RA 11313 offers a tangible response mechanism. Together, they create a holistic approach that connects theory, lived reality, and social responsibility, offering insights for educational reform, advocacy, and institutional development.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Locale

The research employed a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological design (Nigar, 2020) to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of individuals who have encountered hypersexualization from members of the same gender. This approach was chosen for its capacity to capture the depth and complexity of human experiences, emphasizing understanding through interpretation rather than mere description. The study was conducted in a college institution located in Bukidnon, where diverse perspectives and cultural influences provided a rich ground for examining the nuances of intragender hypersexualization within a contemporary educational environment.

Sampling Method and Participants

The study utilized respondent-driven sampling (Navarrete et al., 2022) to identify participants who could meaningfully contribute to the inquiry. This method was suitable for accessing individuals who have directly experienced intragender hypersexualization, particularly within a community where such experiences might be sensitive or underreported. Participants were selected based on the following criteria: they must identify as male, female, or part of the LGBTQ+ community, have experienced hypersexualization from a same-gender individual, and express willingness to share their experiences. Implementing this method within a college institution allowed the researchers to capture authentic accounts while fostering trust and mutual respect among participants, ensuring that the sampling process remained both ethical and inclusive.

Table 1. *Demographic profile of the participants.*

Participants	Sex	Age
Participant 1	Male	20
Participant 2	Male	20
Participant 3	Female	19
Participant 4	Male	21
Participant 5	Male	20

The participants of the study, as presented in Table 1, were individuals who had personally encountered intragender hypersexualization within social or

institutional settings. Their inclusion provided firsthand perspectives essential for understanding the interpersonal and emotional dimensions of these experiences. The study aimed to uncover how such encounters influence self-perception, relationships, and everyday interactions by centering the insights of those directly affected. The participants' openness and willingness to engage in the reflective process contributed to a nuanced portrayal of how intragender hypersexualization manifests in lived reality.

Data Gathering Procedure

To facilitate data collection, a researcher-made interview questionnaire served as the primary instrument. This tool was designed to elicit detailed and meaningful narratives, focusing on the participants' lived experiences, interpretations, and reflections. Before its use, the instrument underwent expert validation by three professionals in the fields of psychology, gender studies, and qualitative research. The validation process yielded a Content Validity Index (CVI) of 0.970, confirming that the questionnaire items were both relevant and representative of the study's intent.

Data were gathered through face-to-face, in-depth interviews to allow participants to openly share their experiences in a respectful and supportive setting. Each interview lasted between twenty-five to fifty minutes, depending on the participant's comfort and willingness to elaborate, and was audio-recorded with prior permission to ensure accuracy in capturing their narratives. Before the interview began, the researchers clearly explained the purpose of the inquiry, the nature of the questions, and the role of the participants. Informed consent forms were provided and signed, emphasizing that participation was entirely voluntary and that participants could decline to answer any question or withdraw at any point without consequence.

To promote participant well-being, interviews were conducted in a safe, private, and conducive environment that allowed for confidentiality and minimal distraction. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, a trained psychological first aider was present during the conduct of the interviews to provide immediate support if emotional distress arose. This precaution ensured that participants felt emotionally supported throughout the process and reinforced the ethical commitment of the researchers to protect participants' safety and dignity.

Data Treatment

The researchers employed Hermeneutic Phenomenological Analysis (Ho et al., 2017) to interpret and organize the participants' narratives. This method involved iterative reading, reflection, and interpretation, allowing themes to emerge organically from the data. Through this process, the researchers sought to uncover the essence of participants' lived experiences while situating their meanings within broader social and cultural contexts. The analytical approach emphasized depth, coherence, and sensitivity, ensuring that interpretations remained faithful to the participants' perspectives and aligned with the hermeneutic framework guiding the inquiry.

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Hypersexual Experience

Unwanted Sexual Advances in Public and Everyday Spaces

The results highlight that hypersexual experiences often occurred in ordinary public settings where participants were engaged in routine activities such as walking or exercising. As shared by the participants: "*He then said, 'Migo [Friend], can we go home together to my boarding house, just the two of us.'*" (Participant 2) and "*When I was jogging, he said, 'Hi gang, your thighs are delicious [appealing], can we meet up because my wife is not around.'*" (Participant 3).

These encounters were unsolicited and unexpected, placing participants in situations where sexual intent was imposed without consent. The advances were direct in nature and occurred in spaces generally perceived as safe or neutral, which intensified the sense of intrusion. The data indicate that these moments were not isolated to private interactions but emerged in everyday environments, highlighting how hypersexualization can disrupt normal social movement and personal autonomy.

These experiences suggest that public spaces are not always experienced as secure when personal boundaries are disregarded. The results underscore how such encounters challenge individuals' sense of safety and control, particularly when they occur without warning and involve implied sexual expectations. This pattern reflects broader social issues related to respect, consent, and the recognition of personal boundaries in shared spaces (Boyer, 2022; Makanadar, 2025). The findings emphasize the need for greater awareness and protective measures to ensure that individuals can participate in daily activities without fear of being sexualized or approached inappropriately.

Objectifying Comments Toward the Body

The results highlight that hypersexualization was frequently experienced through comments that focused narrowly on specific body parts or physical appearance. As shared by the participants: "*He said he was attracted to my very white thighs.*" (Participant 3) and "*He was commenting about my body and clothes. It's like he only focused on my sexual side...*" (Participant 4).

Rather than engaging participants as whole persons, these interactions centered on sexualized features, shifting attention away from identity, character, or mutual respect. Such remarks were experienced as reducing individuals to physical traits, reinforcing a sense of being seen primarily through a sexual lens. The data reveal that this form of hypersexualization can occur casually, often framed as observation or attraction, yet it carries a clear impact on how participants perceived the interaction.

The implications of these findings highlight how repeated focus on the body can shape interpersonal experiences and self-perception. When individuals are consistently addressed in terms of appearance rather than personhood, it may weaken feelings of dignity and mutual respect within social relationships. These results point to the importance of recognizing how language and casual remarks contribute to objectification, especially in settings where individuals expect social equality and safety (Pecini et al., 2023; Jiang et al., 2025). Addressing this concern

requires attention to how everyday communication either supports or undermines respectful interaction.

Persistent Sexualized Messaging and Behavior in Social Settings

The results highlight that hypersexual experiences were not always limited to single encounters but, in some cases, occurred repeatedly across different settings. As shared by the participants: "*It started with his text messages, then at school, he always had sexual jokes or looks.*" (Participant 4) and "*I experience that everywhere, but I just ignore it.*" (Participant 5).

Participants described patterns of ongoing sexualized communication, including messages, jokes, and nonverbal cues, that continued over time. These behaviors extended into social and institutional environments, making them difficult to avoid and more challenging to address. The persistence of such actions suggests that hypersexualization can become embedded in regular interactions, blurring the line between social familiarity and disrespect.

The presence of repeated sexualized behavior has important implications for how individuals navigate social spaces. When such actions are frequent, participants may feel compelled to tolerate or ignore them to avoid conflict, which can further normalize inappropriate conduct. The findings highlight how ongoing exposure can affect comfort levels and shape coping strategies, often placing the burden on the individual rather than addressing the behavior itself (Karsay et al., 2018; Santoniccolo et al., 2023; Mulligan et al., 2024). This reinforces the need for clearer social norms and institutional responses that discourage persistent sexualized conduct.

Emotional Discomfort, Fear, and Loss of Safety

The results highlight that hypersexual experiences were closely tied to strong emotional reactions, including fear, discomfort, and uncertainty. As shared by the participants: "*I was shocked and scared...*" (Participant 2), "*Nervousness, fear, I didn't know what I should do...*" (Participant 3), and "*I felt uncomfortable because it's like I was being objectified.*" (Participant 4).

Participants described moments of shock and hesitation, particularly when they felt unable to predict the intentions of the other person. These emotional responses were heightened by the sudden and intrusive nature of the encounters, as well as by concerns for personal safety. The data indicate that hypersexualization was not merely uncomfortable but emotionally distressing, affecting how participants felt during and after the interaction.

These emotional outcomes suggest that hypersexualization can have lasting effects on how individuals experience safety and trust in social environments. Feelings of fear and unease may lead participants to become more cautious or withdrawn in future interactions, altering how they move through public and social spaces. The findings emphasize that emotional harm is a key consequence of such experiences and should be recognized as a serious concern rather than dismissed as minor or situational (Fasoli et al., 2018; Calogero et al., 2021; Boyer, 2022). Addressing these impacts requires acknowledging the emotional weight carried by individuals who experience repeated or intense forms of sexualization.

Reduced to a Sexual Object Rather Than a Whole Person

The results highlight that participants experienced hypersexualization as a form of reduction, where their identity was narrowed to physical appearance rather than recognized in full human terms. As shared by the participants: *"Being hypersexualized... means being reduced to just a body or an image instead of being seen as a full person."* (Participant 1) and *"I feel it's just so rude... they don't show even a little respect..."* (Participant 5).

Interactions were perceived as lacking respect and consideration, with attention directed toward sexualized aspects instead of personal qualities or shared social roles. This reduction shaped how participants understood the nature of these encounters, framing them as moments where dignity was diminished and personal value was overlooked. The data highlight that hypersexualization was not merely an isolated comment or action, but a deeper experience of being treated as an object rather than as an individual.

These results suggest that such experiences have meaningful implications for how individuals view themselves and their place within social interactions. Being consistently reduced to a sexual object may weaken feelings of respect, belonging, and equality, especially in same-gender settings where mutual understanding is often expected. The findings emphasize the importance of recognizing personhood in everyday interactions and reinforce the need for social environments that uphold dignity and respect (Karsay et al., 2018; Boyer, 2022; Pecini et al., 2023). Addressing this concern supports safer and more inclusive spaces where individuals are acknowledged beyond physical appearance.

Discomfort and Avoidance in Interactions with Same-Gender Individuals

The results highlight that experiences of hypersexualization influenced how participants approached interactions with others of the same gender. As shared by the participants: *"It was never easy being comfortable with other guys... Especially if you don't really know them well."* (Participant 1) and *"I chose to ignore it and go on with my jogging... [because] he might get offended... it might put me in danger."* (Participant 3).

Participants described ongoing discomfort that affected their ease in forming connections, particularly with individuals they did not know well. To protect themselves, some chose avoidance or disengagement as a response to situations perceived as risky or uncomfortable. These patterns show how past experiences shaped present behavior, leading participants to limit interaction as a means of maintaining personal safety.

The implications of these findings point to how hypersexualization can alter social participation and trust. Avoidance and hesitation may reduce opportunities for healthy interaction and peer connection, especially in shared social or institutional settings. Over time, this can affect relationship-building and create emotional distance between individuals (Fasoli et al., 2018; Davids et al., 2019; Latham, 2022). The results highlight the need for environments that foster trust and clear boundaries, allowing individuals to interact without fear of misinterpretation or harm.

Limited Responses Due to Confusion or Fear

The results highlight that participants often responded to hypersexual experiences with silence, politeness, or delayed reactions. As shared by the participants: "I didn't have a response because I didn't know (what to do)... I was confused..." (Participant 1), "I laughed first, but later I politely told him that I don't like those comments." (Participant 4), and "As for me, I just don't respond... but there are times when I verbally respond because it's too much." (Participant 5).

Feelings of confusion, uncertainty, and concern for personal safety influenced how participants managed these situations. Rather than confronting the behavior directly, they chose responses that minimized tension or avoided escalation. This approach reflects the difficulty of navigating moments where social expectations and personal boundaries conflict.

These responses suggest that hypersexualization places individuals in situations where asserting boundaries feels risky or unclear. Limited or polite reactions may offer short-term protection but can also leave individuals feeling unheard or unsupported. The results underscore the importance of empowering individuals with clearer avenues for response and support, ensuring that respect and safety do not depend solely on personal coping strategies (Santonniccolo et al., 2023; Jiang et al., 2025; Makanadar, 2025). Creating awareness around appropriate conduct can help reduce the burden placed on those who experience such interactions.

The Hypersexual Experience

Generally, the findings show that hypersexual experiences were marked by unwanted advances, objectifying behaviors, emotional discomfort, and altered social interactions. Participants described being reduced to physical traits, feeling unsafe or uneasy in everyday spaces, and adjusting their behavior through avoidance or restrained responses. These experiences shaped how they navigated relationships, communicated boundaries, and understood respect within same-gender interactions. Taken together, the results emphasize the need for social awareness and institutional responsibility in promoting environments where dignity, safety, and mutual respect are consistently upheld.

Making Sense of the Hypersexualization toward Interpersonal Relationships Heightened Self-Protection and Caution in Social Interactions

Increased Caution and Guardedness

The results indicate that participants responded to hypersexualized experiences by becoming more cautious and guarded in their interactions with others. As shared by the participants: "I became a bit more guarded because I'm so scared now." (Participant 1), "It changed how I view other guys... I would always doubt if they are really showing what they truly are." (Participant 2), and "I became more careful about who I approach... I'm more aware of boundaries." (Participant 4).

This guardedness was reflected in increased awareness of personal boundaries and a growing sense of doubt toward the intentions of same-gender individuals. Rather than approaching interactions openly, participants described a shift toward careful observation and emotional restraint. These patterns

indicate that hypersexualization shaped how participants interpreted social cues, leading them to prioritize self-protection when engaging with others.

This increased caution suggests that hypersexualized encounters have a direct influence on how interpersonal relationships are formed and maintained. While being guarded may help individuals protect themselves from further discomfort, it can also limit openness and trust in social interactions. Over time, this may affect the depth and quality of relationships, particularly in environments where social connection is important (Calogero et al., 2021; Boyer, 2022; Jiang et al., 2025). The findings highlight how experiences of boundary violation can reshape everyday social behavior and reinforce the need for respectful and clearly defined interactions.

Need to Assess Trust and Intentions

The results indicate a strong need to assess trust and intentions before feeling comfortable in social situations. As shared by the participants: *"Being comfortable with other guys was never easy... especially if you don't really know them well."* (Participant 2) and *"Comfort level depends on the person and the environment."* (Participant 3).

Comfort was closely tied to familiarity with the person and the surrounding environment, indicating that safety was not assumed but carefully evaluated. Interactions with unfamiliar individuals were often approached with hesitation, as participants weighed possible risks before engaging. This shows that hypersexualized experiences influenced how participants made sense of social closeness and personal safety.

The need to constantly assess trust suggests that interpersonal interactions became more conditional and selective. While this careful approach can reduce exposure to discomfort, it may also create emotional distance and slow the development of new relationships. These findings emphasize how experiences of hypersexualization can alter social decision-making, placing the responsibility of safety largely on the individual rather than on shared social norms of respect (Davids et al., 2019; Calogero et al., 2021; Makanadar, 2025).

Synthesizing these points, the results show that heightened self-protection was expressed through increased caution, emotional guardedness, and careful assessment of others' intentions. Participants adjusted how they engaged socially by setting clearer boundaries and limiting interactions to environments or individuals perceived as safer. This pattern reflects how hypersexualized experiences reshaped everyday social behavior, leading individuals to prioritize personal safety while navigating interpersonal relationships.

Impact on Mental Health and Sense of Identity

Emotional Distress and Anxiety

The results indicate that hypersexualized experiences had emotional effects that extended beyond the immediate interaction. As shared by a participant: *"Even just a little gesture or sign can already trigger the anxiety that has built up inside me."* (Participant 1). Participants described ongoing feelings of anxiety, where even small gestures or cues could trigger emotional discomfort. These reactions indicate that hypersexualization left lasting emotional impressions that

influenced how participants experienced daily social encounters. Emotional distress was not tied to isolated incidents but became part of how participants interpreted interactions over time.

This emotional impact suggests that hypersexualization can affect overall well-being and sense of security in social spaces. Persistent anxiety may reduce comfort in routine interactions and increase emotional strain. The findings highlight the importance of recognizing how repeated boundary violations can affect mental health, reinforcing the need for supportive environments that promote emotional safety and respect (Calogero et al., 2021; Latham, 2022; Santoniccolo et al., 2023; Jiang et al., 2025).

Reflection on Being Reduced to a Physical Object

Participants also reflected on the experience of being reduced to physical appearance rather than being seen as a whole person. As shared by the participants: *"Being hypersexualized... means being reduced to just a body or an image instead of being seen as a full person."* (Participant 1) and *"You are just reduced to the physical aspect instead of seeing you as a full person."* (Participant 3).

This reduction shaped how they understood their identity in social interactions, as value was placed on physical traits rather than personal character. Such experiences influenced self-perception and how participants positioned themselves within social relationships.

These reflections suggest that being consistently viewed through a physical lens can challenge one's sense of identity and self-worth. When individuals feel unseen beyond their appearance, it may affect confidence and belonging (Karsay et al., 2018; Calogero et al., 2021; Stegeman et al., 2025). The findings underscore the importance of social recognition that affirms personhood and respects individuality in all interactions.

Maintaining Personal Integrity and Respect

Despite these challenges, participants expressed a strong emphasis on maintaining personal integrity and respect. As shared by the participants: *"Some people confuse joking with respect."* (Participant 4) and *"You should put [or give] respect to a person."* (Participant 5).

They highlighted the importance of clear boundaries and the distinction between humor and respectful behavior. This focus shows that participants actively sought to uphold their values even in difficult social situations. Maintaining personal integrity appears to function as a coping and grounding mechanism. By emphasizing respect, participants reinforced their sense of self and asserted expectations for appropriate interaction (Calogero et al., 2021; Boyer, 2022; Pecini et al., 2023). This finding points to the role of personal values in navigating uncomfortable experiences and sustaining a sense of dignity.

Synthesizing these points, the findings related to mental health and sense of identity show that hypersexualized experiences had emotional effects that extended beyond the moment of interaction. Participants described emotional distress, heightened anxiety, and reflections on being reduced to physical appearance. These experiences influenced how individuals viewed themselves

and navigated social spaces, highlighting the link between repeated boundary violations and emotional well-being.

Re-Evaluation of Relationships and Social Boundaries

Shift in How They Connect with Same-Gender Individuals

The results indicate a noticeable shift in how participants connected with same-gender individuals. As shared by the participants: *"It did change how I relate to others of the same gender."* (Participant 1) and *"It complicates relationships and social life."* (Participant 3).

Relationships became more complex, with participants reevaluating how they related to others and how much emotional access they allowed. Social interactions were approached with greater thoughtfulness and caution. This shift suggests that hypersexualized experiences can reshape social networks and relational dynamics. While such reevaluation may help individuals avoid harmful interactions, it can also complicate social life and limit ease of connection (Calogero et al., 2021; Boyer, 2022; Makanadar, 2025). The findings highlight how personal experiences can influence broader patterns of social engagement.

Distinguishing Between Safe and Unsafe Individuals

Participants further demonstrated the ability to distinguish between individuals who felt safe and those who did not. As shared by the participants:

"Not everyone is the same, there are still people who are respectful and know limitations." (Participant 1) and *"I didn't generalize that all men are like that... I have close male friends who treat me right."* (Participant 3).

Rather than generalizing negative experiences, they recognized that respectful and supportive relationships still existed. This distinction allowed them to maintain meaningful connections while remaining cautious. This ability to differentiate reflects an adaptive response to past experiences. It shows that participants balanced self-protection with fairness and openness, allowing room for trust where respect was evident (Calogero et al., 2021; Boyer, 2022; Pecini et al., 2023). Such discernment supports healthier social interactions without reinforcing blanket mistrust.

Learning to Assert Boundaries

Participants also described learning to assert boundaries more clearly over time. As shared by a participant: *"I learned to stand up for myself."* (Participant 3). Through experience, they became more confident in standing up for themselves and communicating limits. This growth reflects an active process of reclaiming control within social interactions. Learning to assert boundaries suggests a positive adjustment following difficult experiences. By expressing limits, participants strengthened their sense of agency and self-respect (Calogero et al., 2021; Boyer, 2022; Jiang et al., 2025). This finding highlights how navigating hypersexualized experiences can lead to greater awareness of personal rights and boundaries.

Synthesizing these points, the findings show that participants reevaluated relationships and social boundaries in response to hypersexualized experiences. They adjusted how they connected with others, learned to identify safe

interactions, and developed stronger boundary-setting practices. Together, these changes reflect an ongoing process of making sense of social experiences while striving to protect well-being, maintain respect, and preserve meaningful interpersonal relationships.

Normalization and Emotional Detachment as Coping Interpretations

Downplaying Experiences to Avoid Trouble

The results indicate that some participants responded to hypersexualized encounters by downplaying their experiences to avoid further conflict or trouble. As shared by a participant: "*For now, I just ignore it so that there won't be trouble/hassle.*" (Participant 5). Rather than confronting or addressing the situation, participants chose to ignore or dismiss the incident as a way to maintain peace and reduce immediate stress. This pattern reflects a coping approach where emotional distance is created to manage discomfort, allowing individuals to continue daily interactions without escalation. The result shows how normalization becomes a practical response shaped by concern for personal safety and social consequences.

This tendency to downplay experiences has important implications for understanding how hypersexualization is processed in interpersonal relationships. While ignoring such incidents may prevent immediate tension, it can also silence personal discomfort and leave harmful behaviors unchallenged. Over time, this coping strategy may reinforce the idea that such experiences are tolerable or unavoidable, which can limit opportunities for asserting boundaries and seeking support (Davids et al., 2019; Calogero et al., 2021; Latham, 2022). The findings highlight how avoidance can serve as short-term protection but may carry longer-term emotional and relational costs.

Viewing Hypersexualization as Common or Expected

The results indicate that participants viewed hypersexualization as something common or expected in everyday interactions. As shared by the participants: "*I just accept it/consider it normal because it's happening so frequently these days.*" (Participant 3) and "*It's up to you how you handle the situation.*" (Participant 4).

Experiences were framed as part of current social realities, where responsibility was placed on the individual to decide how to respond. This perspective suggests that repeated exposure led participants to see these behaviors as normalized rather than exceptional, shaping how they interpreted and managed such encounters. The data show a shift from questioning the behavior to adjusting personal reactions.

Viewing hypersexualization as common has broader implications for interpersonal relationships and social norms. When such experiences are treated as expected, individuals may feel pressure to adapt rather than challenge inappropriate behavior. This can lead to emotional detachment, where responses become more controlled and less expressive (Calogero et al., 2021; Santoniccolo et al., 2023; Mulligan et al., 2024; Stegeman et al., 2025). The findings suggest that normalization may reduce immediate distress but also risks minimizing the seriousness of boundary violations in social spaces.

Synthesizing these points, the themes show that normalization and emotional detachment functioned as coping interpretations in response to hypersexualized experiences. Participants managed discomfort by ignoring incidents and reframing them as ordinary, allowing them to continue social interactions with less visible conflict. These strategies reflect attempts to preserve stability and personal safety, even if emotional concerns remain unspoken.

Reinforcing the Need for Respect and Personal Boundaries

Recognizing the Importance of Mutual Respect

The results indicate that participants developed a stronger awareness of the importance of mutual respect in social interactions. As shared by the participant: *"It made me more aware of the importance of respecting people's boundaries regardless of gender or orientation."* (Participant 1) and *"You should put [or give] respect to a person."* (Participant 5). Experiences of discomfort highlighted the need to recognize and honor personal boundaries regardless of gender or orientation. Participants emphasized respect as a core value that should guide interactions, indicating that hypersexualized encounters prompted reflection on how people should treat one another. This awareness shows a clear recognition of respect as central to healthy relationships.

The emphasis on mutual respect suggests that participants used their experiences to reinforce expectations for appropriate behavior. Recognizing respect as essential may help individuals navigate social spaces more confidently and set clearer limits (Calogero et al., 2021; Boyer, 2022; Pecini et al., 2023). The findings imply that such awareness can support healthier interactions by promoting accountability and shared responsibility in maintaining safe and respectful environments.

Clarity Between Humor and Disrespect

Participants also demonstrated clarity in distinguishing between humor and disrespect. As shared by a participant: *"Some people confuse joking with respect. It's not okay to see someone only for their body."* (Participant 4). The findings show that sexualized remarks were not viewed as harmless jokes but as actions that reduced individuals to their bodies. This distinction reflects an understanding that intent does not excuse impact, especially when comments cause discomfort. The data highlight a clear boundary between acceptable social interaction and behavior that undermines dignity.

This clarity has important implications for reinforcing personal boundaries. By recognizing when humor crosses into disrespect, individuals are better positioned to identify inappropriate behavior and respond accordingly (Calogero et al., 2021; Boyer, 2022; Santoniccolo et al., 2023; McCole & Anderson, 2025). The findings suggest that clearer social understanding can help reduce confusion and challenge the normalization of harmful remarks in everyday interactions.

Synthesizing these points, the results show that experiences of hypersexualization reinforced the need for respect and clear personal boundaries. Participants emphasized mutual respect and developed a stronger sense of what constitutes acceptable interaction. These themes reflect a collective

understanding that safety and dignity in social spaces depend on recognizing and honoring individual limits.

Hypersexualization toward Interpersonal Relationships

Generally, the findings show that making sense of hypersexualization involved a complex process of coping, reflection, and adjustment in interpersonal relationships. Participants responded through normalization, emotional detachment, increased awareness of respect, and clearer boundary setting. Together, these patterns illustrate how individuals actively interpret and manage hypersexualized experiences while striving to protect their well-being, maintain dignity, and navigate social relationships more cautiously and thoughtfully.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. The study relied on a small group of participants, which limits the range of experiences represented and reduces the ability to reflect the diversity of intragender interactions across different contexts. Data were gathered through self-reported narratives, which may have been influenced by memory, personal comfort in sharing sensitive experiences, or the presence of emotional distress during recall. In addition, the use of face-to-face interviews may have led some participants to withhold details or soften their accounts despite ethical safeguards. These factors suggest that while the findings provide meaningful insight into lived experiences, they should be understood as context-specific rather than broadly generalizable.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings show that participants experienced intragender hypersexualization in everyday and social spaces through unwanted advances, sexualized comments, persistent behaviors, and interactions that reduced them to physical traits rather than recognizing them as whole persons. These experiences were not isolated incidents but occurred across public, social, and interpersonal contexts, shaping how participants felt, reacted, and related to others of the same gender. Emotional responses such as discomfort, fear, anxiety, and loss of safety were consistently reported, leading participants to adopt various coping responses, including avoidance, guardedness, normalization, and emotional detachment. Across the narratives, participants became more cautious in social interactions, more aware of boundaries, and more selective in assessing trust and intent.

As participants made sense of these experiences, they engaged in reflection that influenced their interpersonal relationships and sense of self. Some chose to downplay incidents to avoid conflict, while others learned to assert boundaries and distinguish respectful behavior from disrespect disguised as humor. Despite negative encounters, participants did not generalize their experiences to all same-gender individuals, instead recognizing the presence of both safe and unsafe interactions. This process of meaning-making reflects an active effort to protect personal well-being, maintain dignity, and navigate social relationships more

carefully, showing how intragender hypersexualization reshapes social engagement rather than merely causing momentary discomfort.

The study generates new knowledge by showing that intragender hypersexualization is experienced as a relational and emotional process that affects safety, identity, and everyday interactions, not only as isolated acts of inappropriate behavior. The findings highlight how individuals interpret these experiences through coping, reflection, and boundary-setting, revealing that the impact extends into mental well-being and long-term relationship patterns. By centering lived experiences, the study deepens understanding of how hypersexualization within the same gender influences how people see themselves and others, and how they adjust their social behavior in response.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, it is recommended that institutions and community groups strengthen awareness and education on respectful boundaries within same-gender interactions. Programs that promote clear understanding of consent, respect, and safe communication may help reduce behaviors that lead to discomfort and fear. Support systems, such as accessible reporting mechanisms and trained responders, should also be reinforced to ensure that individuals feel safe seeking help. Encouraging open dialogue about intragender hypersexualization can help normalize conversations around boundaries and promote more inclusive and respectful social environments.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Future studies may expand on these findings by including a larger and more diverse group of participants to capture a wider range of experiences across age groups, identities, and social settings. Quantitative or mixed-method approaches may also be used to examine the frequency and patterns of intragender hypersexualization and its links to mental well-being. Longitudinal studies could further explore how these experiences shape relationships and self-perception over time. Such research would deepen understanding of the issue and support the development of more targeted interventions and policies.

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