

Sexual Narcissism: Measurement and Correlates Among College Men

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We investigated the factor structure of Hurlbert's Index of Sexual Narcissism (ISN) and then explored the relationship between the ISN composite score and subscales scores and various sexual constructs among 209 heterosexual male college students. An exploratory principle components factor analysis revealed four factors accounting for most of the ISN items: Sexual Knowledge and Skill, Sense of Entitlement, Emotional Distance in Sexual Relationships, and Sex as Fun. The pattern of relationships between these four subscales and other sexuality constructs supports consideration of the components of sexual narcissism as distinct. With virtually all of the sexuality variables, the sexual narcissism subscales were as predictive as the composite ISN score, or more so. Implications of these results are discussed.

To understand sexuality, it is important to explore relevant personality dimensions. In reviewing the literature, Byrne and Schulte (1990) concluded that "all of this research makes it very clear that personality dispositions are crucial determinants of sexual behavior" (p. 109). That is, individuals appear to vary with regard to specific, stable dispositions that are, in turn, related to sexual attitudes and behavior.

The concept of sexual narcissism is one personality construct that, apparently, has not been looked at from a nonclinical perspective. Hurlbert and Apt (1991) studied military men who had been physically abusive toward their wives and noted that many of these men appeared to engage in a pattern of egocentric sexual interaction. These authors labeled the constellation of characteristics within this egocentric pattern *sexual narcissism*. Subsequently, Hurlbert, Apt, Gasar, Wilson, and Murphy (1994) introduced a self-report measure of sexual narcissism, the Index of Sexual Narcissism (ISN). Conceptualized as a sexual variant of

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the clinical construct of narcissistic personality disorder, sexual narcissism was described to include sexual preoccupation and compulsivity, promiscuity, an inflated sense of sexual skill, interpersonal exploitiveness, and a sense of entitlement (Hurlbert & Apt, 1991; Hurlbert et al., 1994). At the same time, sexual narcissism was said to be related to sexual dissatisfaction, sexual boredom, and an inability to experience empathy and emotional intimacy (Hurlbert & Apt, 1991; Hurlbert et al., 1994).

Hurlbert and colleagues (1994) investigated the relationship between sexual narcissism and narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) by comparing a group of military men who received a primary diagnosis of NPD with a group of military men who exhibited no personality disorders. They reported that those men with NPD displayed many of the features comprising sexual narcissism. Specifically, the men with NPD had higher scores on the ISN, greater numbers of sexual partners, higher sexual esteem, and greater incidence of extramarital affairs than the men without personality disorders. However, the two groups did not exhibit differences in sexual depression or sexual preoccupation.

To date, no published research has investigated sexual narcissism and its correlates in a nonclinical sample. The Hurlbert et al. (1994) study is limited in what it can tell us about sexual narcissism by the small, unique sample examined (i.e., married military men, $N = 70$), as well as the fact that comparisons were based on men with a personality disorder diagnosis. We wondered about potential relationships between sexual narcissism and other sexuality constructs among young men in a nonclinical sample. That is, if sexual narcissism exists as a continuous phenomenon (as opposed to a discrete categorical variable), increasing scores on a measure of sexual narcissism should be related in predictable ways to a variety of sexual variables.

Given that sexual narcissism is conceptualized to include a casual orientation toward sexual interaction, a preoccupation with sexual activity, and an inflated sense of sexual skill, we expected scores on the ISN to be positively related to number of sexual partners, sexual esteem, and sexual preoccupation, and negatively related to traditional sexual values. These findings would replicate previous research (Hurlbert et al., 1994). We were also interested in additional variables. Because sexual narcissism is conceptualized to include a compulsive component, and a tendency toward sexual boredom, we expected scores on the ISN to be positively related to sexual sensation seeking, exposure to sexually explicit media, and the importance placed on sex within a heterosexual relationship.

In addition to exploring relationships between sexual narcissism and other relevant sexuality variables among young men, we also examined the factor structure of the ISN. Sexual narcissism was conceptualized as a multifaceted construct (Hurlbert & Apt, 1991; Hurlbert et al., 1994). The problem with constructing a measure of a multifaceted construct is that the measure is liable to consist of several factors, each related to a distinct facet of the larger construct. Using an overall summary score for a multifaceted measure may result in loss of potentially important

information (Carver, 1989; Mershon & Gorsuch, 1988). That is, correlations between summary scores on the measure and other variables begs the question of what factors are responsible for the apparent relationships. Theoretically relevant variables may be differentially related to the components of the proposed personality construct. In such a situation, correlating the summary index with these variables would leave the component relationships unknown. Conversely, a nonsignificant correlation between a summary index and another variable may mask significant component correlations.

METHOD

Subjects

Participants were 209 male introductory psychology students, enrolled in a midsized, midwestern state university, who described their sexual orientation as exclusively heterosexual. Their ages ranged from 18 to 22 years, with a mean of 19.51 ($SD = 1.14$).

Measures

Participants completed a questionnaire composed of the scales and items described below. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. "Attitudes Towards Sex and Sexuality" consisted of interspersed items from scales assessing sexual sensation seeking, sexual preoccupation, traditional sexual values, sexual narcissism, and general sexual attitudes. Participants responded to the items in this section on a 9-point scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly Agree* to 9 = *Strongly Disagree*. The second part of the questionnaire, labeled "Sexual Experiences," consisted of a measure of lifetime sexual experience, four items assessing respondents' exposure to sexually explicit media, and an item assessing respondents' sexual orientation. Across measures, higher scores represent higher levels of the respective construct (or more positive attitudes when that is what was measured).

Sexual narcissism. The ISN was used to assess the extent of narcissistic sexual behavior. The scale is composed of 25 statements such as "My partner seldom gives me the sexual praise I deserve," "I believe I have a special style of making love," and "Emotional closeness can easily get in the way of sexual pleasure." Respondents indicate their degree of agreement or disagreement with each statement. The internal consistency of the scale in our sample was .82.

Sexual sensation seeking. Kalichman and Rompa's (1995) Sexual Sensation Seeking Scale and Watt and Ewing's (1996) Sexual Stimulation Scale were combined to assess respondents' propensity to seek out new sexual experiences. This combined scale was composed of 21 items such as "I am interested in trying out new sexual experiences," "I feel like

exploring my sexuality” (Kalichman & Rompa, 1995), “I’m more interested in excitement and stimulation in a sexual relationship than security and commitment,” and “I prefer sexual relationships that are exciting and unpredictable (Watt & Ewing, 1996). The internal consistency of the combined scale in our sample as .84.

Sexual esteem. Sexual esteem, or the tendency to evaluate oneself positively as a sexual partner, was measured with the short form (Wiederman & Allgeier, 1993b) of the Sexual-Esteem Scale from Snell and Papini (1989). Respondents indicated their degree of agreement with five statements such as “I am a good sexual partner” and “I would rate my sexual skill quite highly.” The internal consistency of the scale in our sample was .91.

Sexual preoccupation. Sexual preoccupation was measured by the short form (Wiederman & Allgeier, 1993b) of Snell and Papini’s Sexual Preoccupation Scale (1989). The scale is composed of five items such as “I think about sex all the time” and “I tend to be preoccupied with sex.” The internal consistency of the scale in our sample was .92.

Traditional sexual values. We assessed participants’ endorsement of traditional sexual values with the Sex-Love-Marriage Association Scale (Weis, Slosnerick, Cate, & Sollie, 1986). The scale is composed of eight items such as “A man can’t have a satisfactory and satisfying sex life without being in love with his partner” and “Sex thoughts about someone other than the sex partner during intercourse with the partner are a form of unfaithfulness.” The internal consistency of the scale in our sample was .68.

General sexual attitudes. We used the Sexual Opinion Survey (SOS; Fisher, Byrne, White, & Kelly, 1988) to assess general attitudes toward sex along a positive-negative dimension (erotophilia-erotophobia). The SOS is composed of 21 items, such as “Swimming in the nude with a member of the opposite sex would be an exciting experience,” “The thought of engaging in unusual sexual practices is highly arousing,” and “Thoughts that I may have homosexual tendencies do not worry me at all.” The internal consistency coefficient was .80.

Sexually explicit media. Each respondent was asked to list the number of times during the previous six months that he had viewed each of four types of sexually explicit media: (a) “Sexual magazines available at outlets such as convenience stores and newsstands. Examples include *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, and *Hustler*”; (b) “Sexual magazines or books that show actual sexual intercourse and other sexual acts, such as those usually available only in ‘adults only’ bookstores”; (c) “Movies or videos that include graphic but stimulated sexual acts, such as those rated X or NC-17”; and (d) “Movies or videos that show actual sexual intercourse and

other acts, such as those usually found only in 'adults only' (XXX) sections of video rental stores." Exposure to sexually explicit media was scored as the sum of the responses to the four items. Internal consistency for our sample was .76.

Sexual experience. Each participant reported the extent of lifetime sexual experience with partners by indicating whether he had ever participated in each of nine listed behaviors ranging from a "Casual good-night kiss" to "Sexual intercourse (penis in vagina)." Extent of sexual experience was scored as the number of different behaviors endorsed (0–9). Recent sexual experience was measured in the same way except that a time frame of the preceding six months was included in the instructions presented with the list of sexual activities.

The lifetime number of sexual partners was assessed by the following question: "How many different partners have you had sexual intercourse with during your lifetime?" Number of recent partners was assessed in the same fashion except that "in the last six months" replaced "during your lifetime."

Importance of sex. The importance of sex was measured by a 3-item scale (Wiederman & Allgeier, 1993a). It contained items such as "Sex is the best part of intimate dating relationships" and "It is important that my steady dating relationships include sexual activity." Internal consistency of the scale for our sample was .79.

Procedure

Potential participants were recruited through an ongoing departmental subject pool. When signing up for potential participation in the study, respondents were aware only that participation was worth one hour of research credit. The nature of the study was not disclosed until arrival at the testing site. None of the potential participants refused to participate upon learning of the nature of the study. Participants completed the anonymous questionnaire in groups ranging from 5 to 20 men, and all participants did so in the presence of the first author.

RESULTS

The current sample of young adult men displayed a fair degree of sexual experience: 78% reported experiencing vaginal intercourse at some point and, of those with coital experience, the mean number of partners was 5.1 ($SD = 6.4$). Within the prior six months, 67% of the sample had engaged in vaginal intercourse, with the mean number of partners for this group being 1.9 ($SD = 1.7$). For the entire sample (both virgin and nonvirgin), 79% reported having engaged in either genital fondling or oral stimulation of a female partner, and 84% reported being fondled or orally stimulated by a female partner.

TABLE 1
Correlations Among Scores on the Hurlbert Index of Sexual Narcissism
and the Scale Components

	Knowledge and skill	Sense of entitlement	Emotional distance	Sex as fun
Knowledge and skill	(.76)			
Sense of entitlement	.34*	(.70)		
Emotional distance	-.03	.31*	(.65)	
Sex as fun	.22*	.36*	.26*	(.69)
Sexual narcissism (total scale)	.46*	.70*	.57*	.65*

Note: Values in parentheses (along the diagonal) indicate internal consistency coefficients.

* $p < .01$.

An exploratory principle components factor analysis using varimax rotation was performed on the 25 items comprising the ISN. Eight factors emerged with eigenvalues greater than one, accounting for 62% of the variance. However, four of these factors were defined by single items or were comprised of items exhibiting substantial cross-loading on other factors. The remaining four factors comprised disparate items representing distinct components of sexual narcissism (see Appendix). One factor consisted of items related to self-assessment of a high degree of *Sexual Knowledge and Skill* (eigenvalue = 4.8). Another factor referred to a *Sense of Entitlement* regarding sex when in a relationship (eigenvalue = 3.0). The third aspect of sexual narcissism involved a preference for *Emotional Distance* in sexual relationships (eigenvalue = 1.6). The last factor referred to a view of *Sex as Fun* and something not to be taken too seriously (eigenvalue = 1.5). We considered the respective items on each factor to comprise subscales and we computed subscale scores by summing the responses to the individual items comprising each subscale. Correlations among scores on these four subscales are presented in Table 1.

The correlation coefficients for the relationships between sexual narcissism and the sexuality variables of interest are presented in Table 2. Note that, before calculating each correlation, extreme statistical outliers were trimmed (Tabachnik & Fidell, 1996) (effective sample size for each analysis ranged from 202 to 209). We replicated the results of Hurlbert et al. (1994) in our nonclinical sample with regard to three scales. Higher scores on sexual narcissism were significantly associated with a greater number of sex partners during one's lifetime, higher scores on sexual preoccupation, and higher scores on sexual esteem. In general, scores of the sexual narcissism scale were significantly related to nearly all of the other sexuality variables; especially strong relationships were exhibited with sexual sensation seeking and importance placed on sex within a heterosexual relationship.

Correlations between the sexuality variables and scores on each of the four new subscales are also presented in Table 2. Depending on the variable under consideration, significant relationships were exhibited between the sexuality variable and anywhere from one to all four of the

TABLE 2
Correlations Between Measures of Sexual Narcissism and Other Variables

	Total scale	Knowledge and skill	Sense of entitlement	Emotional distance	Sex as fun	Combined subscales
Sexual sensation seeking	.71*	.38*	.59*	.43*	.51*	.71*
Traditional sexual values	-.45*	-.22*	-.36*	-.29*	-.35*	-.47*
Sexual preoccupation	.46*	.22*	.41*	.20*	.34*	.45*
Sexual Opinion Survey	.15	.12	.06	-.02	.24*	.27*
Sexual esteem	.40*	.78*	.34*	-.04	.20*	.81*
Importance of sex	.65*	.33*	.66*	.27*	.44*	.70*
Exposure to sexual media	.29*	.12	.17*	.11	.10	.20
Partners—lifetime	.26*	.29*	.24*	.07	.16	.33*
Partners—recent	.28*	.32*	.32*	.09	.14	.40*
Sexual experience—lifetime	.09	.34*	.08	.01	.12	.34*
Sexual experience—recent	.19*	.34*	.16	.06	.09	.36*

* $p < .01$.

ISN subscales. However, because the ISN subscales themselves are correlated (see Table 1), it is impossible to tell in Table 2 which relationships are unique rather than a result of intercorrelation (shared variance) among the components of sexual narcissism.

To discern unique relationships between each subscale and each of the sexuality variables, we entered scores on the subscales simultaneously in a series of multiple regression analyses to predict each of the sexuality variables. Additionally, we estimated the proportion of variance accounted for by each predictor variable based on the t ratio for the unstandardized regression coefficient associated with each variable (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991). These estimates, calculated as $t^2 / (t + df)$, are shown in Table 3. We recognize that these estimates are imprecise; however, they do illustrate the *relative* strength of each predictor variable. The importance of these estimates lies in the fact that they illustrate the relationship between each subscale and the sexuality variable, while *holding effects of the other subscales statistically constant*. The p values shown in Table 3 are those associated with the actual t tests for the unstandardized regression coefficients for each predictor from the multiple regression analyses.

DISCUSSION

The results of the current study supported the findings of Hurlbert et al. (1994) in that a strong association was exhibited between sexual narcissism and sexual preoccupation, sexual esteem, and lifetime number of sexual partners. In addition, we found sexual narcissism to be related to increased sexual sensation seeking and an increased importance placed on sex. We learned, however, that using a summary index of sexual narcissism gives an incomplete picture of these relationships.

TABLE 3
 Unique Proportion of Variance Accounted for by Each Subscale of the
 Sexual Narcissism Scale

	Knowledge and skill	Sense of entitlement	Emotional distance	Sex as fun
Sexual sensation seeking	.07*	.14*	.09*	.11*
Traditional sexual values	.01	.03*	.03*	.05*
Sexual preoccupation	.00	.07*	.00	.04*
Sexual Opinion Survey	.00	.00	.00	.06*
Sexual esteem	.58*	.01	.00	.00
Importance of sex	.01	.30*	.00	.05*
Exposure to sexual media	.00	.00	.00	.00
Partners—lifetime	.05*	.01	.00	.00
Partners—recent	.05*	.05*	.00	.00
Sexual experience—lifetime	.10*	.00	.00	.00
Sexual experience—recent	.10*	.00	.00	.00

* $p < .05$

The four subscales derived from the ISN were differentially related to the other sexuality variables in the study. For example, whereas four subscales were uniquely predictive of sexual sensation seeking, only two subscales (Sense of Entitlement and Sex as Fun) were uniquely predictive of sexual preoccupation and importance placed on sex, and only one subscale (Knowledge and Skill) was uniquely predictive of sexual esteem (see Table 3). Looking only at the relationship between the summary index of sexual narcissism and these variables, one is unable to make these finer distinctions, which may be important for practical or theoretical purposes.

Sexual narcissism is characterized by a potentially inflated view of self as a superior sex partner, along with a set of attitudes involving expected sex and a casual, pleasure orientation to sex. Due to the potentially inflated view of self that sexually narcissistic men might have, we need to be cautious in interpreting certain relationships, such as the positive correlation between number of sex partners and scores on the Knowledge and Skill subscale. Men high on this dimension may be the ones most likely to exaggerate the number of partners they report.

The lack of a relationship between sexual narcissism and exposure to sexually explicit media was unexpected. A possible explanation for this may be our failure to include the Internet as a source of sexually explicit media. The Internet provides a place where one can indulge almost any sexual interest, 24 hours a day, and access to it is readily available on most university campuses. It appears that at least a minority of men in college access the Internet on a regular basis for the purpose of seeking out sexual stimuli (Scherer, 1997). It is reasonable to assume that if a college male has ready, cost-free access to this form of sexually explicit media, he is less likely to use magazines or videos. Future research looking at the relationship between sexual narcissism and the use of sexually

explicit media needs to include the Internet as an additional source for this material.

The relationship found between the number of recent sex partners and the Sense of Entitlement subscale needs further exploration. This aspect of sexual narcissism has to do with feelings of being in charge and viewing sex as a right within a heterosexual relationship. Additional research should examine whether this sense of entitlement to sex means that sexually narcissistic men are more prone to sexual aggression or coercion. Are these feelings of entitlement behaviorally expressed, thus offering a possible explanation for the increased number of reported partners? Other explanations for the association between number of recent sex partners and Sense of Entitlement is that these men may be more involved in extradyadic sex (sex outside of one's primary relationship), or they simply do not have a primary sexual partner and are involved only in casual sex. These are possibilities requiring additional investigation.

At the conceptual level, the results of the current study highlight work that needs to be done in the measurement of sexual narcissism. That is, the subscales we found seem to cover the components of inflated sense of sexual skill, a casual, nonrelational view of sexual activity, and a sense of sexual entitlement within relationships. However, additional aspects of sexual narcissism are not represented among the subscales, including compulsive and exploitive elements, a tendency toward sexual boredom, and a decreased capacity for empathy and emotional intimacy.

One might argue that this lack of coverage resulted from exclusion of the nine ISN items that did not load on any of the four subscales. However, note in Table 2 that the composite correlation (multiple R) between the subscales and the other sexuality variables was at least as large as the correlation between the ISN score and the sexuality variables, and in many cases the subscales, as a group, were more highly related than the full 25-item ISN. How can this be? It appears that the nine ISN items we excluded were not consistently related to the other sexuality variables, and in some cases actually obscured or decreased apparent relationships between sexual narcissism and the sexuality variable. Inspection of the nine excluded items reveals why this may be the case. Some of these items seemed to run counter to the notion of egocentric orientation toward sexual activity (e.g., "Pleasing yourself in sex is most important *because it is hard to please someone sexually if you do not know how to please yourself first*" and "*Couples should leave a relationship when they find sex to no longer be enjoyable*"—emphasis added). Other excluded items appear to have more to do with general sexual attitudes than with sexual narcissism per se (e.g., "I think that people have the right to do anything they please in sex," "I have no sexual inhibitions," and "In a close relationship, if a sexual act feels good, it is right").

A limitation of the current study involves the fact that we looked only at a population of young heterosexual men. Future research needs to consider women and how they compare to men in the expression of

sexual narcissism. Also, do the relationships between these various sexual variables remain the same when age, sexual orientation, and subcultural influences are taken into account? It is important that future research investigate the effect these and other variables have on the expression of sexual narcissism.

In closing, the issues inherent in the scoring of the ISN illustrate common issues that need to be explicitly addressed when considering measures of multifaceted personality or sexuality constructs. Especially important is the question of whether to combine individual components of a multifaceted construct. There are certainly situations in which combining components is appropriate, such as when they represent a latent variable or when, from a theoretical perspective, the combined variable is more important, more interesting, or represents a more appropriate level of abstraction than do the individual components. In such cases, however, it is important that the combined variable adequately cover the various specific domains comprising the larger construct. Accordingly, further work is needed on the measurement of sexual narcissism.

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APPENDIX

Items Comprising the Four Subscales of the Hurlbert Index of Sexual Narcissism

Knowledge and skill

4. When it comes to sex, I consider myself a knowledgeable person.
6. I believe I have a special style of making love.
15. I think I am better at sex than most people my age.
22. I know some pretty unique sexual techniques.

Sense of entitlement

1. In sex, I like to be the one in charge.
5. In a close relationship, sex is an entitlement.
14. In certain situations, sexually cheating on a partner is justifiable.
16. In a close relationship, I would expect my partner to fulfill my sexual wishes.
18. In a relationship where I commit myself, sex is a right.
19. In order to have a good sexual relationship, at least one partner needs to take charge.

Emotional distance

13. Too much relationship closeness can interfere with sexual pleasure.
20. Relationships that are too close are often too demanding.
23. Emotional closeness can easily get in the way of sexual pleasure.

Sex as fun

3. In general, most people take sex too seriously.
 11. Not enough people have sex for fun anymore.
 21. When it comes to sex, not enough people live for the moment.
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