

Unwanted Consensual Sex – The Implications for Women

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Abstract

Drawing on cross-disciplinary scholarship, this paper explores how patriarchal constructions of gender, desire, and sexuality intersect within heterosexual frameworks to uphold inequality in heteronormative sexual relationships. Focusing on cisgender women's experiences of consenting to unwanted sex in long-term heterosexual relationships, this study examines the personal, relational, and social implications of such engagement. This paper argues that despite desire for equality within heterosexual relations, adherence to deeply gendered sexual scripts sustain androcentric sexual norms. Highlighting the paucity of language to describe unwanted sex, and the frequency with which it occurs, this paper challenges claims that such engagement is relationally beneficial. Instead, it posits that unwanted sex can have negative implications for women, including reduced sexual and relationship satisfaction, increased physical discomfort, mental health symptoms, and experiences of sexual dysphoria. This study will employ Standpoint Narrative Inquiry, an innovative methodology combining feminist Standpoint Theory and Narrative Inquiry, to explore how women's marginalised, embodied experiences shape the stories they tell about sex, consent, and agency. Standpoint Theory prioritises the epistemic value of knowledge rooted in lived oppression, while Narrative Inquiry enables nuanced engagement with personal accounts. Semi-structured, double interviews will support a participant-led, flexible format that centres women's voices. As fieldwork is yet to commence, this paper lays the theoretical and methodological groundwork for the study. Grounded in feminist epistemology, this paper positions unwanted but consensual sex as a critical lens through which to examine the persistence of gendered power imbalances in heterosexual relationships.

Keywords: Gender; Heteronormativity; Heterosex; Inequality; Sexual Scripts.