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# The Consequences of Sexual Compliance Scale (CSCS): Scale Development and Psychometric Properties

Sabina Nickull <sup>a</sup>, Martin Lagerström <sup>a</sup>, Patrick Jern <sup>a</sup>, and Annika Gunst <sup>a,b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Psychology, Åbo Akademi University; <sup>b</sup>Department of Clinical Psychology, Maastricht University

## ABSTRACT

Sexual compliance (i.e., consenting to sexual activity despite the lack of initial desire for it) is common in committed relationships. Previous research has shown that sexual compliance can have both positive and negative consequences for the well-being of the individual and the relationship. The aim of the present study was to develop a scale to measure the perceived consequences of sexual compliance, using exploratory factor analysis. The scale items were developed based on previous research and administered to a Finnish population-based sample of adults ( $N = 1,159$ ). A two-factor model, explaining 40% of the total variance, was selected to create the Consequences of Sexual Compliance Scale (CSCS). The final scale included two subscales, with 10 items measuring perceived positive consequences and 10 items measuring perceived negative consequences of sexual compliance. The individuals in the current sample perceived significantly more positive than negative consequences of sexual compliance, suggesting that engaging in sex without initial sexual desire does not harm well-being for most people. Our scale can be used by researchers and clinicians who wish to further explore the perceived consequences of sexual compliance.

## Introduction



Sexual compliance refers to consenting to and engaging in sexual activity without sexual desire (e.g., Impett & Peplau, 2003; Katz & Tirone, 2009; O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998), and as consent is given freely, compliance is distinct from sexual coercion or assault (Katz & Tirone, 2009). Compliance is a widespread phenomenon in committed relationships, with previous research using convenience samples showing that between 37% and 64% of people have complied to sex at least once with their current partner (Himanen & Gunst, 2023; Katz & Tirone, 2009). Sexual compliance occurs frequently in committed relationships, as between 38% and 46% of participants reported consenting to unwanted sexual activity with their partner at least once in the past three weeks (O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010). Some studies have found that women comply to sex more often than men (Himanen & Gunst, 2023; O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998), but others have not found any gender differences (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010).


Sexual compliance can be a possible solution to a common sexual interdependence dilemma in intimate relationships, that is that one person desires more sex than the other (i.e., sexual desire discrepancy; Day et al., 2015). Interdependence theory explores the interaction between individuals and the conflicts that arise when motivations differ (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). The solving of this conflict is especially important within sexual relationships, as most intimate relationships are monogamous (Haupt et al., 2017), and follow the notion that sexual needs should only be satisfied within the relationship. This increases the power the partners have over

each other, and the interdependence (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). How this conflict is solved and the motives behind the solution can have consequences for the satisfaction with the relationship (Day et al., 2015).

There are many different reasons for complying to sex, such as wanting to promote intimacy or avoid tension in a relationship (O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998). Undergraduate students have also reported complying to sex due to alcohol intoxication (Willis et al., 2022) or to earn respect from one's peers (Quinn-Nilas et al., 2018). To understand motives for sex, an approach-avoidance framework has been applied and extended to the compliance literature. Approach motives, that is having sex to obtain something positive, such as pleasure or intimacy, and avoidance motives, that is having sex to avoid something negative, such as a fight with the partner, have been shown to be equally common in compliant sex (Impett & Peplau, 2003). For desired sex, approach motives tend to be more common than avoidance motives (Impett & Peplau, 2003). In desired sex, approach motives have been shown to be positively associated with positive emotions and relationship well-being, while avoidance motives have been associated with more negative emotions and less relationship wellbeing (Impett et al., 2005). Similar results have been found in the context of sexual compliance, as approach motives have been associated with the perception of positive consequences and avoidance motives have been associated with the perception of negative consequences of compliance (Himanen & Gunst, 2023).

Participants from convenience samples commonly report perceiving both positive and negative consequences for well-

**CONTACT** Sabina Nickull  [sabina.nickull@abo.fi](mailto:sabina.nickull@abo.fi)  Department of Psychology, Åbo Akademi University, Tehtaankatu 2, Turku 20500, Finland

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being as a result of complying to sex. The perceived positive consequences mostly relate to relationship benefits, such as increased intimacy (Himanen & Gunst, 2023; O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998; Quinn-Nilas et al., 2018), avoided relationship tension, and increasing the partner's satisfaction (O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998). Conversely, sexual compliance may also be detrimental to some relationships, being associated with lower relationship satisfaction (Himanen & Gunst, 2023; Rubinsky, 2020), lower enjoyment of sex (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010), and lower sexual satisfaction for the compliant person (Himanen & Gunst, 2023). Sexual compliance can also be associated with perceived negative consequences for the complying individual, such as decrements in measures of mood and self-esteem (Himanen & Gunst, 2023), and lower mental health scores (Rubinsky, 2020). Research suggests that the perceived consequences vary greatly both between and within individuals. For instance, one study found that more than a third of participants perceived both positive and negative consequences of sexual compliance (Himanen & Gunst, 2023). The contradictory nature of the previous research may be at least partly attributable to different definitions of sexual compliance, or different ways of measuring the perceived consequences.

To our knowledge, no psychometrically evaluated measure of perceived consequences of sexual compliance has yet been developed. Himanen and Gunst (2023) used a self-constructed measure in which participants were asked to rate the following possible consequences of compliance: 1) mood, 2) self-esteem, 3) relationship satisfaction, 4) intimacy in the relationship, 5) trust in the relationship, 6) feelings of love or attachment, and 7) sexual satisfaction on a 7-point Likert scale, with the anchors 1 (*affected very negatively*) and 7 (*affected very positively*), with a neutral option (4, *not affected*) in the middle. The scale was shown to have excellent internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .92$ ). In addition, they included an optional open-ended question so that participants could report any relevant areas that were not included in their scale. Indeed, new themes emerged from the open-ended question, such as decreased sexual desire, poorer mental health, and communication issues, to name a few. Therefore, their self-constructed measure seems to have omitted some aspects that may be central to the perceived consequences of sexual compliance.

Other studies have also used open-ended questions to explore the perceived consequences of sexual compliance. O'Sullivan and Allgeier (1998), for instance, asked participants to describe the good or bad things that occurred, or good or bad things that never occurred, as a result of deciding to engage in unwanted sexual activity. The answers were categorized based on previous research into the positive categories of: partner's satisfaction; own sexual satisfaction; promotion of intimacy; avoided relationship tension; enjoyable non-sexual interaction; and the negative categories of: emotional discomfort; physical discomfort; and relationship tension. Another study used an interview format to explore the perceived consequences of sexual compliance by asking their male participants ( $N = 12$ ) to discuss the costs and rewards of sexual compliance (Quinn-Nilas et al., 2018). The men perceived only limited threats to themselves as a result of sexual compliance, but some men mentioned a risk of unwanted

pregnancy or sexually transmitted infection after being prompted by the interviewer.

A more recent qualitative study by Gunst et al. (2024) explored the perceived consequences of sexual compliance in a convenience sample of 107 adults who had complied with sex in a committed relationship at least once. Gunst et al. (2024) used a qualitative survey to ask whether complying to sexual activities had ever affected the participants personally or the participants' relationship. The participants were asked to write down all positive and negative consequences for themselves and their relationship. Themes that emerged from the responses were, for example, increased or decreased relationship satisfaction, increased or decreased mood, and increased or decreased quality of sex. Some previously unstudied themes were also included, such as experiencing physical pain and valuing sex in the relationship.

Most other studies on the topic have examined associations between sexual compliance and specific variables, such as mental health and relationship satisfaction, to gain insight into possible consequences of sexual compliance (e.g., Rubinsky, 2020; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010). This approach allows for testing specific hypotheses, but is limited by the need to select the potential consequences in advance, leading to a risk of missing important information.

Our aim was to develop a scale that measures participants' own perceptions of how sexual compliance affects them and their relationships, including both positive and negative outcomes. Sexual compliance has been proposed as a clinical recommendation for managing desire discrepancy between partners (Mark, 2015), despite the mixed results regarding the perceived consequences. Promoting sexual health and happy relationships is essential, and we need to further explore how best to do this in cases of desire discrepancy (Dewitte et al., 2020). A better understanding of the perceived consequences of sexual compliance may help clinicians to advise their clients on this issue. Developing reliable measures of these perceived consequences is a key first step toward this goal, motivating our decision to create a dedicated scale. To ensure that we included relevant themes in our scale, we developed items based on previous research on the topic. The items were administered to a Finnish population-based sample ( $N = 1,159$ ) and were analyzed using exploratory factor analysis. The results of the exploratory factor analysis guided the number and nature of the extracted factors.

## Method

### Measures

We based the development of the scale on reports from a qualitative study by Gunst et al. (2024). The aforementioned study used the same definition of sexual compliance as we did, and provided the most comprehensive information on the topic, by including both themes from previous research and new themes. Gunst et al. (2024) used qualitative content analysis to create categories representing positive and negative consequences of sexual compliance for the well-being of the individual and the relationship. The categories that were mentioned by more than 15% of all participants who responded to

the questions were selected as the basis for creating items. We chose 15% as the inclusion threshold, as we wanted to cover as many categories as possible while still excluding categories that were not relevant to most participants, and to limit the number of items to avoid tiring the participants. Examples of categories that were excluded were wasting time by complying to sex and the partner behaving better after the participant complied to sex.

This selection method resulted in selecting a total of 12 categories that measure negative consequences and a total of 8 categories that measure positive consequences. Six of the negative consequences categories and 4 of the positive consequence categories were related to personal consequences, and the remaining categories were related to consequences for the relationship. Three items were created per included category based on the free text responses of that category, resulting in a total of 60 items. The categories and frequencies were based on a pre-print of the qualitative study, and some have thus changed in the published version due to edits in the coding of the answers. For example, the category for experiencing something new sexually was not included in the present study, although related categories were included, such as feeling that the sex turned out good despite an initial lack of desire. The categories and related items can be found in Table 1.

The items were created in English and then translated according to best approximation into Finnish and Swedish for the survey. Three bilingual psychology students, whose mother tongues are Swedish and Finnish and who are fluent in English, independently translated the items. These translations were then discussed with the students and the coauthors to reach a consensus on which translation best conveyed the nuances of the original items. The items were presented with the question: “During the past 3 months, have you experienced the following as a result of complying to sex?” We chose to limit the time frame to three months to measure current aspects of sexual compliance. The answers were given on a Likert-scale with the options: 1 = *Never*, 2 = *Some of the time*, 3 = *Half of the time*, 4 = *Most of the time*, and 5 = *All of the time*.

## Procedure

The Consequences of Sexual Compliance Scale (CSCS) was part of a large, population-based survey measuring different aspects of sexuality and relationships. The invitation to the survey was sent by postal mail to 30,000 people aged 18–50 living in Finland and having either Finnish or Swedish (the official languages of Finland) as their mother tongue. The people and their postal addresses were randomly selected by the Digital and Population Data Service Agency of Finland, which maintains the national population registry. Based on results from previous population-based surveys conducted by the research group (Johansson et al., 2013; Tybur et al., 2020), we expected a final sample to consist of roughly 2/3 responses from women with an equal (50/50) gender distribution in the number of people contacted. Therefore, we invited 20,000 men and 10,000 women to participate in the study, to arrive at an even gender distribution in the final sample (the population registry of Finland currently only recognizes male and female sex). The invitation letters were sent out beginning on the 19<sup>th</sup>

of September 2023, and the survey closed on 23<sup>rd</sup> of October 2023. The letter contained information about the purpose of the data collection along with a link and a QR code to the questionnaire on the secure online platform. As an incentive to participate, participants were given the opportunity to enter a lottery for 30 gift cards worth 25€ to a business conglomerate that operates shops, grocery stores, hotels, restaurants, and petrol stations throughout Finland (each person could only win one gift card).

## Research Ethics

The Research Ethics Board for Psychology and Speech and Language Pathology at Åbo Akademi University gave a favorable evaluation of the research plan for the present study on February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2023. In accordance with the Helsinki declaration, participants were informed that participation was voluntary and that they could cancel their participation at any time.

## Definition of Sexual Compliance

The definition of compliance was included in the questionnaire prior to the relevant questions. In our study, sexual compliance and other relevant concepts were defined as follows:

Sexual compliance means consensually engaging in sexual activity with a partner despite the lack (at least in the beginning) of sexual desire for it. Sexual compliance differs from sexual coercion and assault, as sexual compliance refers to situations where consent has been given voluntarily (either explicitly or implicitly), without any pressure, manipulation, or coercion from the partner. Sexual activity means a broad range of sexual behaviors which can include, for instance, petting/touching of genitals, oral sex, or penetrative sex. Sexual desire means being interested in and personally motivated to engage in sexual activity, with or without physical reactions. (e.g., erection, tingling, lubrication)

The same definition was used in the qualitative data collection on which the items were based, except that the definition of sexual activity in the qualitative data collection included video/phone sex (Gunst et al., 2024). We chose this definition because it is comprehensive, as it includes instances where the desire increases during the sexual activity (i.e., responsive desire; Basson, 2000).

## Participants

A total of 2,163 people responded before the survey closed, yielding a response rate of 7.2%. Participants without at least one current sex partner, dating partner, or committed partner ( $n = 537$ ) were excluded from the analyses of the present study, as they had not been administered the CSCS. The remaining participants were asked if they had had sex with their current partner(s), and those who had not were also excluded ( $n = 11$ ), as were those who had never had sex at all ( $n = 17$ ). Participants who had had sex with their current partner were asked roughly how many times they had complied to sex with their current partner, with the options “never,” “once,” “a handful of times,” “a few dozen times,” and “more than a hundred times.” People with multiple partners were asked to consider their primary partner or their longest relationship. All participants who had complied to sex at least once with their current partner were distributed the CSCS. A total of

**Table 1.** Questions and categories from the qualitative study and the created items.

Questions	Categories	Items
Negative personal consequences	Negative feelings	You felt anxious You felt bad afterward You felt regret
	Negative feelings about self	You felt guilt Your self-esteem decreased You felt shame
	Feeling pressured/violated	You felt pressured You felt used You felt disrespected by your partner
	Decreased quality of sex	The sex was less pleasurable than usual You felt less of enjoyment from sex than usual You felt that sex is a chore
	Decreased sexual desire	Your sexual desire decreased You became less interested in having sex Your ability to notice your sexual desire decreased
	Physical pain	You experienced physical pain during sex You experienced physical discomfort during sex You received genital wounds
Positive personal consequences	Sex turned out good	The sex was pleasurable You felt that the sex turned out good The sex was enjoyable
	Responsive sexual desire	Your ability to notice your sexual desire increased You noticed that your sexual desire increased after you started having sex You knew that your desire would increase during sex
	Positive feelings	You felt good afterward You felt happy You experienced a positive effect on your well-being
	Enjoy making partner happy	You enjoyed making your partner happy It felt nice to satisfy your partner You were happy to please your partner
Negative consequences for the relationship	Worse relationship	The amount of tension in your relationship increased It caused strains in your relationship Your relationship became worse
	Partner is hurt	Your partner felt less desired Your partner took your lack of desire personally Your partner felt bad afterward
	Negative feelings toward partner	You felt resentment toward your partner You felt less attracted by your partner You felt disgust toward your partner
	Decreased trust	It made you trust your relationship less It made you trust your partner less You felt less safe with your partner
	Problematic future sexual dynamic	Your attitudes toward future sex became less relaxed Your partner got a false impression about your sexual desire Your partner feels obliged to comply to sex in the future
	More tension/conflicts	You had more fights with your partner You had more conflicts with your partner There was more friction in your relationship
Positive consequences for the relationship	Closeness/connectedness	You felt emotionally closer to your partner Your emotional connection with your partner improved You felt tenderness toward your partner
	Partner is satisfied	Your partner became satisfied Your partner was in a better mood afterward Your partner felt good
	Values sex in relationship	It helped you maintain your sex life You thought that frequent sex is good for the relationship You thought that it was important to have sex
	Better relationship	Your relationship became stronger Your relationship improved It helped your relationship work better

85.5% of those with a current partner had complied to sex at least once with that same partner, and participants who had never complied to sex with their current partner were excluded ( $n = 232$ ). Furthermore, participants with missing data on the CSCS (due to dropout,  $n = 207$ ) were excluded, leaving a final sample of 1,159 participants. Gender minority participants were included in the factor analysis, but excluded in the gender comparisons of the final factor solution, as they were too few to include as a separate group ( $n = 9$ ).

The mean age of the participants included in this study was 33.9 years ( $SD = 9.1$ ). Half of the participants identified as (cis) women (51.9%), and the rest identified as (cis) men (47.3%), non-binary (0.3%), or transmen (or men with a trans background; 0.4%). The mean length of the participants' relationships was 8.9 years ( $SD = 8.0$ ). Almost 40% of the sample estimated that they had complied more than a hundred times with their current partner. See [Table 2](#) for more information about the sample.

**Table 2.** Demographic characteristics of participants.

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Frequency of compliance		
Once	38	3.3
A handful of times	352	30.4
A few dozen times	316	27.3
More than a hundred times	453	39.1
Gender		
Woman	602	51.9
Man	548	47.3
Transwoman/woman with trans background	0	0
Transman/man with trans background	5	0.4
Non-binary	4	0.3
Other	0	0
Sexual orientation		
Heterosexual	999	86.2
Bisexual	102	8.8
Gay/lesbian	16	1.4
Pansexual	28	2.4
Asexual	4	0.3
Other	10	0.9
Relationship status		
Sex partner	43	3.7
Dating partner	35	3.0
Committed partner	969	83.6
Several sex/dating partners	36	3.1
Several committed partners	5	0.4
One committed partner and (sometimes) other dating and/or sex partners	67	5.8
Several committed partners and (sometimes) other dating and/or sex partners	4	0.3
Education		
Middle/junior high school (9 years)	42	3.6
Vocational school or high school (12 years)	460	39.7
Bachelor's degree (applied or university)	398	34.3
Master's degree (applied or university)	235	20.3
Licentiate/doctorate degree	23	2.0
Other	1	0.1
Occupation		
Studying	201	17.3
Employed or self-employed	861	74.3
Retired	16	1.4
Unemployed	43	3.7
Other	38	3.3
Monthly gross income		
Less than 500€	89	7.7
500–999€	94	8.1
1,000–1,999€	136	11.7
2,000–2,999€	310	26.7
3,000–3,999€	235	20.3
4,000–4,999€	141	12.2
5,000–5,999€	88	7.6
6,000€ or more	66	5.7
Nationality		
Finnish	1156	99.7
Other	3	0.3
Language		
Finnish	1081	93.3
Swedish	72	6.2
English	6	0.5

*N* = 1159.

### Data Analysis

We used R version 4.3.1 and the *psych* package (Revelle, 2023) to do the exploratory factor analysis and followed the best practice guidelines for exploratory factor analysis as described by Sakaluk and Short (2017). We started by exploring the multivariate normality of the data and found that the data did not meet the assumption of multivariate normality. Therefore, we extracted factors using the principal factors method, which is an extraction method that is free of distributional assumptions (Brown, 2006). The Oblimin oblique rotation method was used, since we expected that the factors would

be correlated. We used the guidelines by Fabrigar and Wegener (2011) for factor retention, as recommended (Sakaluk & Short, 2017). The guidelines state that the ideal model is a model where including one fewer common factor would do worse in accounting for correlations between variables, and including one more factor would not do substantially better in explaining the correlations, and additionally, that the retained factors should be readily interpretable and related to theoretical constructs (Fabrigar & Wegener, 2011). A combination of scree test and parallel analysis was used to determine the number of factors to retain. The model fit was explored using the root mean square error of approximation

(RMSEA), the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), and the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI). Scores higher than .95 indicate good model fit for TLI, and scores lower than .08 for SRMR and lower than .06 for RMSEA are indicative of good model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Model fit has been found to not be appropriate to guide factor retention (Montoya & Edwards, 2021), but we chose to include it for future reference. Lastly, we provide descriptive data and comparison of the relationship between demographic variables (i.e., age, gender, education level, and relationship duration) and sum scores of the extracted factors of perceived consequences of sexual compliance.

## Results

### Exploratory Factor Analysis

Parallel analysis suggested that 15 factors best fit the data, and the scree test suggested two or five factors (see Figure 1). Based on the theoretical categorization that was used in the qualitative study, a four-factor model could be plausible (measuring positive and negative consequences for the individual, and the relationship, respectively). Other theoretically plausible models would be a single factor model or a two-factor model. We examined all suggested models for cross-loadings, factor reliability, and theoretical application.

The 15-factor solution displayed the best model fit,  $SRMR = .01$ ,  $RMSEA = .03$  (95% CI: .03, .03),  $TLI = .95$ , and explained 60% of the variance. However, one of the included factors had no items which had factor loadings larger than .3, indicating that the model contained too many factors. The five-factor solution explained 48% of the variance,  $SRMR = .04$ ,  $RMSEA = .06$  (95% CI: .06, .06),  $TLI = .83$ , but six items had cross-loadings and loaded strongly on two different factors. The four-factor model,  $SRMR = .04$ ,  $RMSEA = .06$  (95% CI: .06, .06),  $TLI = .81$ , explained 45% of the variance, but had similar issues with cross-loadings, as five items were cross-loaded on two different factors. The two-factor model had worse model fit,  $SRMR = .05$ ,  $RMSEA = .08$  (95% CI: .08, .08),  $TLI = .71$ , but most items loaded strongly on one of the factors (>.30),

with no cross-loadings. The two-factor model explained 40% of the variance. The one-factor model had the poorest model fit  $SRMR = .13$ ,  $RMSEA = .10$  (95% CI: .10, .11),  $TLI = .47$ , and explained 28% of the variance.

Although the fifteen-, five- and four-factor models explained more total variance and had better model fit than the two-factor model, the theoretical interpretation of the factors was unclear (see factor loadings in supplementary Tables S1-S4). The item division in the two-factor solution was more readily interpretable than the rest and was clearly related to theoretical constructs. We chose to continue with a two-factor solution to create a cleaner and simpler model. The first factor measures the positive consequences of sexual compliance (positive factor), and the second factor measures the negative consequences of sexual compliance (negative factor). Initially, a total of 24 items loaded strongly on the positive factor and 34 on the negative factor. Two items did not load strongly on any factor. See standardized factor loadings for each item in Table 3.

Next, we explored the factors to reduce the number of included items, using factor loadings, item-total correlation, and content analysis. We excluded two items with low factor loadings on both factors (<.30). Next, we explored the item total correlation to remove weak items from the factors. None of the items for the positive factor had low item-total correlation, but three items from the negative factor had low item-total correlation (<.40). Thus, we removed the three items from the negative factor (see Table 3).

Items within factors that were highly correlated ( $r \geq .80$ ) were excluded to streamline the factors without losing information. Eleven items within the positive factor had strong correlations with each other, and five of these items were subsequently removed from the factor (see Table 3). No items were strongly correlated on the negative factor.

We then examined the content of the items, with the goal of retaining as much of the underlying information of each factor as possible. This was achieved by removing redundant items that were assumed by the research group to measure the same underlying concept. We also looked at the wording of the questions and kept those we deemed were easier to understand. In the end, 10 items remained on the positive factor and 10 items remained on the negative factor (See final version of the

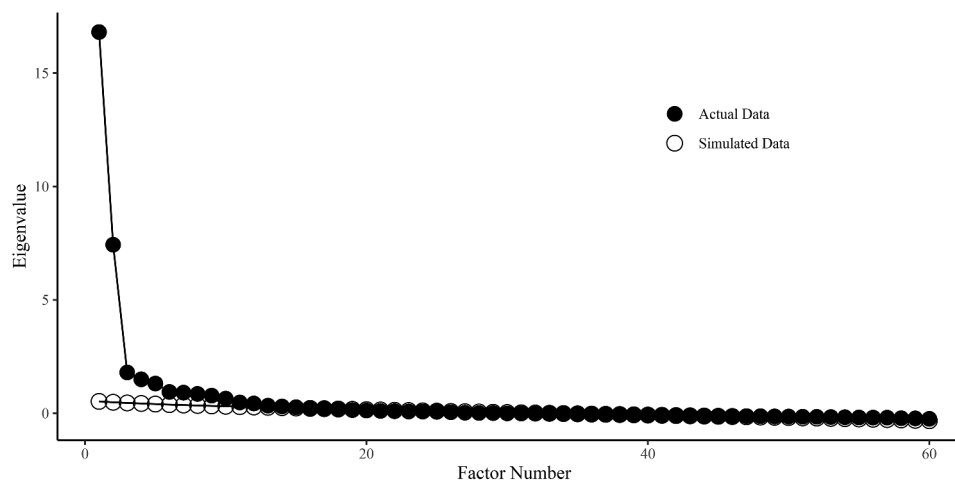


Figure 1. Scree plot of eigenvalues.



**Table 3.** Standardized factor loadings of the two-factor model of the CSCS.

Item	Factor loading	
	1	2
Positive consequences		
27. You felt emotionally closer to your partner	<b>0.81</b>	-0.04
38. Your emotional connection with your partner improved <sup>b</sup>	<b>0.80</b>	-0.03
25. You felt happy	<b>0.79</b>	-0.14
21. The sex was pleasurable	<b>0.79</b>	-0.14
26. You felt tenderness toward your partner <sup>b</sup>	<b>0.79</b>	-0.13
42. It felt nice to satisfy your partner <sup>c</sup>	<b>0.79</b>	-0.04
43. Your partner felt good <sup>c</sup>	<b>0.79</b>	0.15
19. You felt good afterward <sup>c</sup>	<b>0.78</b>	-0.16
32. You experienced a positive effect on your well-being	<b>0.77</b>	-0.07
37. You enjoyed making your partner happy	<b>0.77</b>	0.00
20. It helped your relationship work better <sup>c</sup>	<b>0.76</b>	0.04
17. The sex was enjoyable <sup>b</sup>	<b>0.75</b>	-0.12
47. You were happy to please your partner <sup>b</sup>	<b>0.75</b>	-0.08
6. Your relationship became stronger <sup>b</sup>	<b>0.74</b>	0.01
33. Your partner became satisfied	<b>0.74</b>	0.12
13. Your relationship improved	<b>0.74</b>	-0.01
39. Your partner was in a better mood afterward	<b>0.74</b>	0.23
58. You felt that the sex turned out good <sup>c</sup>	<b>0.73</b>	-0.13
59. You thought that it was important to have sex <sup>c</sup>	<b>0.67</b>	0.18
48. It helped you maintain your sex life	<b>0.64</b>	0.09
53. You thought that frequent sex is good for the relationship <sup>c</sup>	<b>0.63</b>	0.19
30. Your ability to notice your sexual desire increased <sup>c</sup>	<b>0.54</b>	0.08
12. You knew that your desire would increase during sex <sup>c</sup>	<b>0.54</b>	0.04
5. You noticed that your sexual desire increased after you started having sex	<b>0.52</b>	0.06
Negative consequences		
52. You felt resentment toward your partner	-0.01	<b>0.67</b>
1. You felt bad afterward <sup>c</sup>	-0.10	<b>0.66</b>
2. You felt anxious	-0.06	<b>0.65</b>
29. Your relationship became worse <sup>c</sup>	-0.03	<b>0.65</b>
50. The amount of tension in your relationship increased	0.01	<b>0.65</b>
57. There was more friction in your relationship <sup>c</sup>	0.07	<b>0.64</b>
56. You felt less attracted by your partner <sup>c</sup>	-0.02	<b>0.64</b>
23. It caused strains in your relationship <sup>c</sup>	0.04	<b>0.63</b>
22. You felt that sex is a chore <sup>c</sup>	-0.09	<b>0.61</b>
11. Your sexual desire decreased	-0.06	<b>0.61</b>
14. You became less interested in having sex <sup>c</sup>	-0.08	<b>0.60</b>
46. You had more fights with your partner	0.03	<b>0.59</b>
8. You felt regret <sup>c</sup>	-0.08	<b>0.58</b>
28. You felt pressured	-0.03	<b>0.58</b>
24. Your attitudes toward future sex became less relaxed <sup>c</sup>	-0.00	<b>0.58</b>
3. You felt guilt <sup>c</sup>	-0.01	<b>0.57</b>
10. The sex was less pleasurable than usual	-0.08	<b>0.57</b>
60. You felt less of enjoyment from sex than usual <sup>c</sup>	-0.06	<b>0.56</b>
31. Your partner got a false impression about your sexual desire <sup>c</sup>	-0.03	<b>0.56</b>
16. You felt shame <sup>c</sup>	-0.03	<b>0.55</b>
4. You felt disgust toward your partner <sup>c</sup>	-0.01	<b>0.55</b>
54. You had more conflicts with your partner <sup>c</sup>	0.04	<b>0.55</b>
51. It made you trust your relationship less <sup>c</sup>	0.08	<b>0.53</b>
15. Your ability to notice your sexual desire decreased <sup>c</sup>	0.03	<b>0.52</b>
7. Your self-esteem decreased	0.04	<b>0.51</b>
41. Your partner took your lack of desire personally <sup>c</sup>	0.06	<b>0.51</b>
49. You experienced physical discomfort during sex	-0.01	<b>0.51</b>
35. Your partner felt less desired <sup>c</sup>	0.03	<b>0.49</b>
18. It made you trust your partner less	0.01	<b>0.48</b>
40. You felt disrespected by your partner <sup>c</sup>	-0.01	<b>0.48</b>
34. You felt used <sup>c</sup>	0.01	<b>0.46</b>
9. You felt less safe with your partner <sup>a</sup>	0.07	<b>0.41</b>
44. You experienced physical pain during sex <sup>a</sup>	0.08	<b>0.36</b>
45. Your partner felt bad afterward <sup>a</sup>	-0.03	<b>0.33</b>
Items that did not load strongly on any factor		
36. Your partner feels obliged to comply to sex in the future	0.11	0.14
55. You received genital wounds	0.08	0.26

Factor loadings above .30 are in bold.

<sup>a</sup>Items that were removed due to low item total correlation.

<sup>b</sup>Items that were removed due to high correlation with another item.

<sup>c</sup>Items that were removed to streamline the measure.

CSCS in Table 4). Sum scores were created with the possible range of 10 to 50. The abbreviated versions of the two factors correlated highly with the original version of the factors (positive factor  $r = .98$ , negative factor  $r = .95$ ), indicating that the

information was retained in the shorter versions as well. We did a final exploratory factor analysis on the abbreviated version and found that the model fit estimates were close to the recommended cut off scores,  $SRMR = .04$ ,  $RMSEA = .08$  (95% CI:

**Table 4.** Final abbreviated version of the Consequences of Sexual Compliance Scale (CSCS).

Factor	Items
Positive consequences	The sex was pleasurable
	You felt emotionally closer to your partner
	You noticed that your sexual desire increased after you started having sex
	Your partner became satisfied
	You felt happy
	It helped you maintain your sex life
	You enjoyed making your partner happy
	Your relationship improved
	You experienced a positive effect on your well-being
	Your partner was in a better mood afterward
Negative consequences	You felt anxious
	The amount of tension in your relationship increased
	Your self-esteem decreased
	You felt resentment toward your partner
	You felt pressured
	It made you trust your partner less
	The sex was less pleasurable than usual
	Your sexual desire decreased
	You had more fights with your partner
	You experienced physical discomfort during sex

.07, .09),  $TLI = .86$ . The abbreviated versions of the positive and the negative factor had a moderate negative correlation ( $r = -.34$ ) between them. Internal consistency was excellent for the positive consequences factor (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .91$ ), and good for the negative consequences factor (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .82$ ).

### Descriptive Results

The participants experienced more positive consequences ( $M = 37.3$ ,  $SD = 8.9$ , range = 10–50) than negative consequences ( $M = 13.2$ ,  $SD = 3.9$ , range 10–38) in the present population, and the difference was significant and very large,  $t(1158) = 75.3$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 2.2$ . Men ( $M = 38.3$ ,  $SD = 8.6$ ) perceived more positive consequences of sexual compliance than women ( $M = 36.7$ ,  $SD = 9.0$ ), and the difference was small but significant,  $t(1144.8) = 2.9$ ,  $p = .004$ ,  $d = 0.17$ . Women ( $M = 13.7$ ,  $SD = 4.4$ ) perceived more negative consequences of sexual compliance than men ( $M = 12.6$ ,  $SD = 3.2$ ), and the difference was again small but significant,  $t(1093.3) = 4.9$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.29$ .

Age was not correlated with perceiving positive consequences of sexual compliance,  $r < .01$ ,  $p = .986$ , but had a weak, significant negative correlation with experiencing negative consequences,  $r = -.07$ ,  $p = .025$ . This indicates that the perceived negative consequences of sexual compliance decrease with age. The duration of the relationship was neither correlated with positive,  $r = -.03$ ,  $p = .363$ , nor negative,  $r = -.03$ ,  $p = .403$ , consequences of sexual compliance. Level of education was similarly neither associated with positive ( $F(4, 1153) = 0.80$ ,  $p = .526$ ) nor negative ( $F(4, 1153) = 0.63$ ,  $p = .642$ ) consequences of sexual compliance.

### Discussion

In the present study, a scale for measuring the perceived consequences of sexual compliance was developed and psychometrically evaluated. The scale was administered to a Finnish population-based sample and an exploratory factor analysis was performed to analyze the data. Based on

theoretical implications and the scree test we chose a two-factor solution, consisting of one factor measuring the perceived positive consequences of sexual compliance and another factor measuring the negative consequences of sexual compliance. The scale was abbreviated to increase usability without losing any relevant information. Based on these analyses, we developed and evaluated the Consequences for Sexual Compliance Scale (CSCS). To our knowledge, the CSCS is the first psychometrically evaluated scale designed to measure the perceived consequences of sexual compliance. Such a tool is important for advancing research and clinical practice, as it allows us to better understand when, how, and for whom sexual compliance is perceived positively or negatively.

Sexual compliance was common in the present population-based sample, as 86% of participants had complied to sex with their current partner at least once. These figures are similar to the highest estimates from convenience samples, in which the frequency of ever having complied to sex with the current partner varied between 37 and 90% (Himanen & Gunst, 2023; Katz & Tirone, 2009; Quinn-Nilas & Kennett, 2018). In addition, 40% of participants reported having complied more than a hundred times with their current partner. Previous studies have found that young women reported having complied 5–8 times in their lives (Katz & Tirone, 2009, 2010). The difference is big, but it can likely be explained by differences in participants' age and relationship duration, as the mean age for participants in both of Katz and Tirone's studies was 19 years old. Sexual compliance was defined as unwanted intercourse in Katz and Tirone's studies, instead of compliance with an initial lack of desire as in ours, which might also contribute to the differences in frequency.

As sexual compliance is something that occurs in most relationships, it is important to continue to explore the perceived consequences of it. Sexual desire discrepancy between partners is a commonly reported sexual issue (Ellison, 2002), and sexual compliance is a commonly used strategy to deal with desire discrepancy (Herbenick et al., 2014). We hope that the CSCS can be used in both clinical practice and research in the future. It is important that clinicians discuss the perceived consequences of sexual compliance with a client before recommending sexual compliance as a strategy to manage a desire discrepancy, and the CSCS could be used as a basis for this discussion. In addition, the predictors of the perceived consequences should be further researched to shed light on when, or for whom, sexual compliance may be potentially harmful at a group level. We hope that our newly developed measure can help researchers to explore these issues further.

The two-factor model was consistent with results from previous research, which has found that both positive and negative consequences of sexual compliance are common, and that the same individual can experience both positive and negative consequences of sexual compliance simultaneously (Gunst et al., 2024; Himanen & Gunst, 2023). The negative correlation between the factors indicates that an increase in perceived positive consequences was associated with a decrease in perceived negative consequences. However, this correlation was only moderate in size, confirming that some people may experience either both types of consequences, or no valanced consequences at all. This

shows the complexity of sexual compliance and can help us move away from a simplistic view of compliance (i.e., that sexual compliance is either good or bad).

The qualitative responses on which the scale items were based came from four different questions, with a division between personal and relationship consequences. This division was not reproduced in the factor solution, which reflects the overlap between personal and relationship consequences; if you start to feel better about your relationship, you are likely to feel better about yourself, and vice versa. The association between relationship quality and personal well-being is indeed well-documented in the literature (e.g., Proulx et al., 2007). According to these results, future research does not need to ask separately about how sexual compliance influence the individual and the relationship, as they are likely entwined and overlap.

Participants in the present study reported experiencing more positive consequences of compliance than negative consequences, and the effect size was large. This suggests that, at a group level, sexual compliance is perceived to have more benefits than risks. However, it is important to consider the individual variability of the experience and that while many may benefit, others may still perceive very negative consequences of compliance. These findings can be used in sexuality education and clinical practice, by highlighting the potential for positive outcomes, while remaining mindful of the possible negative consequences. These findings differ from previous research, which has found a more even split between positive and negative consequences (Bay-Cheng & Bruns, 2016; Himanen & Gunst, 2023). There are several possible explanations for this. First, the sample in the present study was population-based, which means that it should be more representative of the general population than convenience samples. Studies have shown that convenience samples comprised of students have higher literacy compared to the aged-matched general population (Wild et al., 2022), and that participants in convenience samples are more likely to be younger, have a higher education, live in larger cities, belong to a sexual minority, and to have more sex partners compared to a population-based sample (Ross et al., 2005). Furthermore, it is possible that those who choose to respond in convenience sample studies of sexual compliance are those who have strong opinions or more negative experiences of sexual compliance. To try to avoid this, we promoted our study as a study of sexuality and relationships, but we did not mention sexual compliance in the invitation.

Another possible explanation is that we had a broader definition of sexual compliance than some other studies. While we defined compliance as sex with an initial lack of desire, some have for example used the phrase “unwanted sex” instead (e.g., Katz & Tirone, 2009; Khera et al., 2022; Quinn-Nilas & Kennett, 2018). Unwanted sex has perhaps a more negative connotation than undesired sex, which may lead participants to provide more negative responses when asked about unwanted sex. It remains unclear whether these phrases are interpreted differently or whether they measure the same issue. In addition, including the word “initial” means that our definition includes instances of responsive desire as well, which some of the previous studies have left

out. We have chosen to include “initial” because you cannot know for sure whether desire will arise when you make the decision to comply, so making the decision should be a similar process regardless of any potential responsive desire.

The difference between our results and previous research could also be due to the participants. All of the participants were residents in Finland, which is the 8<sup>th</sup> most gender-equal country in EU according to recent rankings (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2024). Finland also has a comprehensive sexuality education (Ketting et al., 2021), and people in Nordic countries tend to have more liberal sexual values and attitudes compared to other Europeans (Kontula, 2016). This could contribute to a positive view on sex and sexual compliance. Additionally, the participants in our sample were older compared to most previous samples, and our results point toward a negative correlation between age and perceiving negative consequences of compliance. However, as the correlation was small, it is likely only a small part of the reason for the results.

As discussed earlier, sexual compliance can help resolve an interdependence dilemma, as partners in a monogamous relationship often rely exclusively on each other for partnered sexual activities (Day et al., 2015). In these scenarios, interdependence is high, which can lead to increased interdependence over time (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Thibaut and Kelley (1959) described the process as follows: “A will reward B in order to get B to produce behaviour that he, A, finds rewarding. By so doing, A creates conditions under which, through association learning, B is likely to learn to like this behaviour himself.” Applied to sexual compliance, this suggests that one partner’s decision to engage in sex without desire may initially serve to improve relationship satisfaction or avoid conflict. Over time, repeated positive reinforcement may lead the compliant partner to associate sexual compliance with their own pleasure or emotional satisfaction. This process of mutual reinforcement could potentially increase the emotional interdependence in the relationship, helping to explain why sexual compliance, on a group level, is perceived to have more positive than negative consequences.

Furthermore, to solve an interdependence dilemma, one partner must modify their desires in favor of the other, and act in a prosocial manner (in this case, either by the partner without desire agreeing to sex, or the desiring partner declining sex). Acts of accommodation or self-sacrifice tend to be guided by commitment (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003), something that can be assumed to be higher in our population-based sample where participants are more likely to be married, have children, and shared economies, compared to previous studies with samples comprised of college students. If participants in the current sample were more motivated to act prosocially compared to previous studies, this could also help explain why the perceived consequences of sexual compliance were viewed more positively.

We found small but significant gender differences in the perceived consequences of sexual compliance, as men reported experiencing more positive and fewer negative consequences than women. This suggests that gender can be a predictor of the perceived consequences of sexual compliance; however,

due to the small effect size, the significance of this finding may be limited. These results also contradict previous research, as a previous study has not found a significant gender difference in the perceived consequences (O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998). However, the direction of the results in O'Sullivan and Allgeier (1998) was the same as in the present study, as all men experienced some type of positive consequence, and 52% of men did not experience any negative consequences of sexual compliance, whereas 13% of women did not experience any positive consequences, and only 35% of women did not experience any negative consequences of sexual compliance. The difference between the studies could be due to our study having a larger sample size than most studies on the subject, and therefore more power also detect small differences. The nature of the perceived consequences has been found to differ between men and women in qualitative research. Women have reported some negative consequences that men have not, for example negative feelings about themselves, decreased sexual desire, and experiencing physical pain (Gunst et al., 2024).

### **Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions**

One of the strengths of the present study was its population-based sample. The majority of previous studies on sexual compliance have used convenience sampling, and have typically had young adult participants (e.g., Bay-Cheng & Bruns, 2016; Katz & Tirone, 2009; Quinn-Nilas et al., 2018). Most previous studies have also focused exclusively on women or had women-majority samples (e.g., Katz & Tirone, 2009; Willis et al., 2022). The present study included older participants than previous studies, and the participants had been in longer and more diverse forms of relationships, which is more generalizable to the general population. Additionally, we made efforts to oversample men in the present study in order to obtain a higher number of responses from that demographic.

Unfortunately, our response rate was low, landing at 7.2%. This contrasts with another recent population-based Finnish study on sexuality, which used postal mail to target twins and their siblings and achieved a response rate of 29% (Tybur et al., 2020). However, our postal service did not return undelivered letters, so it is worth noting that the response rate was based on the assumption that all letters were delivered. The low response rate may also be explained by the length of the survey, as the invitation letter asked participants to set aside 40 minutes to answer it, which might have seemed too long for some potential participants. Other explanations are likely the lack of reminder letters (due to budgetary limitations), and the fact we made a deliberate choice to include more men (who have been shown to be less likely to participate in health surveys compared to women; Ryan et al., 2019) in order to achieve an even gender distribution in the sample. Comparing our demographic information with official Finnish data, our sample was somewhat more highly educated than the same age group in the Finnish population (Tilastokeskus, 2024). While this is unfortunate, this also tends to be the case in other population-based data collections (Tybur et al., 2020; Vo et al., 2023). Additionally, the proportion of our sample identifying as belonging to a sexual minority was similar to other recent Finnish population-based data (Tybur et al., 2020). This

indicates that our sample was comparable to other Finnish population-based samples with higher response rates. When comparing non-responders and responders on postal sexuality surveys, it has been found that the results may overestimate sexual liberalism, activity, and adversity, but the effect was small so this bias was unlikely to have seriously compromised the results (Dunne et al., 1997).

A potential limitation of the questionnaire is the fact that we asked the participants about their perceived consequences in the last 3 months, but we did not ask whether they had complied to sex in the last 3 months. This means that some of the reports of no consequences may be due to the participants not having recently complied to sex with their current partner, or not having complied more than once. Another limitation is the fact that we developed the scale in English, but most of our sample answered it in Finnish (93%) or Swedish (6%). Although we made our best effort to include all topics previously considered in compliance research, there is still a possibility that some topics may have been missing. The questions in the qualitative study that we based the CSCS on asked about positive and negative consequences, which may have omitted more neutral consequences of sexual compliance. However, positive and negative consequences are more relevant to the well-being of the individual and the relationship than neutral consequences are. The open-ended responses that the CSCS was based on were also divided into personal and relationship-related, which may have excluded some other relevant issues and consequences outside of the self and the relationship, for example on the family dynamic.

Our chosen two-factor solution had a slightly below acceptable model fit when considering the TLI in the present data. The SRMR and RMSEA indicated a good or acceptable model fit. Previous research has shown that model fit indices perform poorly with regard to factor retention (Montoya & Edwards, 2021). Fit indices have been shown to be overly sensitive to correlated residuals and nonspecific error, which increases the risk of over-factoring (Montoya & Edwards, 2021). The SRMR was shown to be the most accurate fit index in the simulations done by Montoya and Edwards (2021), but has been shown to perform poorly in simulations using categorical variables (Garrido et al., 2016). The model fit values in our sample could potentially indicate problems with the items or the way in which perceived consequences of sexual compliance are measured, or be indicative of the fact that most of our sample had not experienced any negative consequences of sexual compliance. The model fit of our proposed factor solution needs to be further investigated and evaluated in other samples.

Future studies should examine the convergent validity of the CSCS, as this was beyond the scope of the present study e.g., by having participants respond to both the CSCS and the scale developed by Himanen and Gunst (2023), or by comparing CSCS scores with measures of approach and avoidance motives, which have been shown to correlate with the perceived consequences of compliance (Himanen & Gunst, 2023; Katz & Tirone, 2010). Finally, because our data were cross-sectional and retrospective, we were not able to test whether complying to sex actually leads to any of these consequences. In the future, it would be important to investigate this issue

using longitudinal data, such as daily diary data collections, to explore the causal effects of complying to sex. It would also be important to further explore the possible predictors of perceiving either positive or negative consequences of sexual compliance, as well as extending the results to other populations.

## Conclusions

Sexual compliance is common in intimate relationships, and the consequences of sexual compliance need to be further explored. The present study developed a new measure of self-perceived consequences of sexual compliance, called the Consequences of Sexual Compliance Scale (CSCS). The scale was developed based on previous research, and administered to a Finnish, population-based sample. Exploratory factor analysis showed that a two-factor solution was feasible, measuring positive and negative consequences of sexual compliance. In our sample, participants reported more positive than negative consequences of sexual compliance. The CSCS can hopefully be further evaluated and used to shed light on potential predictors of sexual compliance, as well as be used as a resource when discussing sexual compliance in sex therapy.

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## ORCID

Sabina Nickull  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9733-7165>  
 Martin Lagerström  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3143-8270>  
 Patrick Jern  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9044-7604>  
 Annika Gunst  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8358-8983>

## Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, S.N., upon reasonable request.

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