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Nickull, Sabina; Jern, Patrick; Niu, Caoyuan; Källström, Marianne; Gunst, Annika

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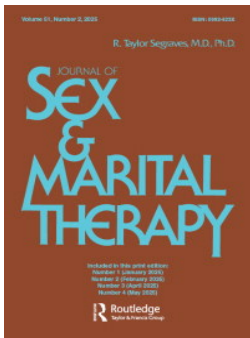
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Predictors of Perceived Positive and Negative Consequences of Sexual Compliance

Sabina Nickull^a , Patrick Jern^a , Caoyuan Niu^{b,c} , Marianne Källström^a  and Annika Gunst^{a,d} 


^aDepartment of Psychology, Åbo Akademi University, Turku, Finland; ^bSchool of Psychology and Cognitive Science, East China Normal University, Shanghai, People's Republic of China; ^cFaculty of Arts and Sciences, NYU Shanghai, Shanghai, People's Republic of China; ^dDepartment of Clinical Psychology, Maastricht University, Maastricht, Netherlands

ABSTRACT

Sexual compliance (i.e., consenting to sex without initial sexual desire) can have both positive and negative consequences for well-being. This study explored predictors of perceived consequences of sexual compliance in cis-gendered men and women from a population-based, Finnish sample (men $n=449$, women $n=499$, age $M=34.1$, relationship duration $M=8.9$). We drew upon existing literature and theoretical frameworks to select the following predictors; sexual approach and avoidance motives, sexual self-efficacy, avoidant and anxious attachment, sexual self-esteem, sexual assertiveness, symptoms of depression and/or anxiety, sexual distress, dyadic sexual communication, dyadic trust, and partner's sexual coercion. The predictors explained 31–38% of the variance in perceived positive consequences and 33–43% of the variance in perceived negative consequences of sexual compliance. Approach motives for sex had the strongest association with perceived positive consequences and having been sexually coerced by one's partner and sexual distress had the strongest associations with perceived negative consequences of sexual compliance. There were some variations in the predictors between genders, but the differing predictors had weak effects on the perceived consequences. Our findings can help clinicians identify focus areas when working with clients who experience a desire discrepancy in their intimate relationships.

Sexual compliance, defined as consenting to sex without initial sexual desire and without being pressured by the partner, is common in intimate relationships. Between 50 and 93% of participants in studies using convenience samples report having complied to sex at some point (Himanen & Gunst, 2024; O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998; Quinn-Nilas & Kennett, 2018). Previous studies indicate that people comply for many different reasons, such as a desire to promote intimacy in a relationship (O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998), due to alcohol intoxication (Willis et al., 2022), or to avoid relationship tension (O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998). The consequences of sexual compliance can be perceived both positively and negatively, depending on the relationship and the context (Gunst et al., 2024). While some studies have explored potential predictors of the perceived consequences of sexual compliance (Gunst et al., 2024; Himanen & Gunst, 2024), the present study aimed to extend this literature by quantitatively testing a broader range of potential predictors. In addition, it sought to replicate the findings of previous studies using a larger, population-based sample.

CONTACT Sabina Nickull  sabina.nickull@abo.fi  Tehtaankatu 2, 20500 Turku, Finland

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Sexual compliance is a commonly reported strategy for managing desire discrepancy in intimate relationships (Herbenick et al., 2014). Sexual desire discrepancy, defined as a mismatch in sexual desire between partners, is likely to occur at some point in most intimate relationships, as sexual desire fluctuates over time (Mark, 2015), and on a daily basis. One study found that couples experienced a desire discrepancy almost 5 out of 7 days a week (Day et al., 2015). Sexual desire discrepancy is negatively associated with sexual and relationship satisfaction (Davies et al., 1999; Mark & Murray, 2012). Addressing desire discrepancy in the context of intimate relationships is important, and sexual compliance has been suggested as a potentially helpful approach to cope with desire discrepancies (Mark, 2015). However, others have argued that sexual compliance can be the result of covert coercion, and that it might be problematic (Conroy et al., 2015). To better understand the pros and cons of this strategy, we need a comprehensive understanding of its consequences for well-being.

Studies have found both positive and negative perceived consequences from sexual compliance. Perceived positive consequences include increased intimacy, pleasing one's partner, and decreased relationship tension (Himanen & Gunst, 2024; O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998; Quinn-Nilas et al., 2018). In contrast, some participants have reported decreased relationship satisfaction (Katz & Tirone, 2009), less pleasurable sex (O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998), or even trauma flashbacks (Himanen & Gunst, 2024) as a result of sexual compliance. Correlational studies have also shown an association between sexual compliance and increased cortisol levels (Hartmann & Crockett, 2016) and poorer mental health (Rubinsky, 2020). It is common for individuals to experience either positive or negative consequences of compliance, and for some individuals to experience both (Himanen & Gunst, 2024; O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998). Exploring the predictors of these perceived consequences is important to better understand when sexual compliance is beneficial or harmful.

There is limited research on predictors of the perceived consequences of sexual compliance, and most studies have used convenience samples consisting of mostly women. Next follows a summary of the literature that has explored potential predictors, and the frameworks that have been utilized. We also chose to include some novel predictors that have been explored in the context of frequency of compliance, or alternatively based on what we know about predictors of general sexual and/or relationship satisfaction.

Individual differences as predictors of perceived consequences of sexual compliance

Previous studies, based on psychological theories of motivation (Katz & Tirone, 2009), have explored sexual motives as predictors of the consequences of sexual compliance. Sexual motives can be categorized into approach motives (i.e., engaging in sex to gain something positive, such as pleasure or intimacy with the partner) and avoidance motives (i.e., engaging in sex to avoid something negative, such as conflict with the partner; Impett et al., 2005). Approach motives for sexual compliance are associated with more perceived positive consequences, whereas avoidance motives are associated with fewer perceived positive consequences of sexual compliance (Himanen & Gunst, 2024). Individuals with stronger avoidance motives experience a more pronounced negative association between frequency of compliance and relationship satisfaction compared to those without avoidance motives for sex (Katz & Tirone, 2009). Participants in a qualitative study also identified several motives aligning with the approach and avoidance framework as factors influencing whether the consequences of sexual compliance were perceived as positive or negative (Gunst et al., 2024).

Kennett et al. (2009) applied Rosenbaum's model of self-control to situations involving the choice to comply to unwanted sex. Their study explored whether aspects of sexual resourcefulness, such as sexual self-efficacy (i.e., a belief in one's ability to handle unwanted sexual advances), were linked to how women cope with situations of consenting to unwanted sex. They found that women with high sexual self-efficacy reported fewer reasons to comply with unwanted sex and were less likely to engage in unwanted sexual experiences (Kennett et al., 2009), which has been confirmed in other studies (Kennett et al., 2013; Quinn-Nilas & Kennett, 2018). One study

found that high sexual self-efficacy was associated with a perception of positive consequences of sexual compliance (Himanen & Gunst, 2024).

Sexual compliance has also been examined from the perspective of attachment theory. Contemporary theories of attachment in adult relationships typically distinguish between two insecure attachment styles: anxious attachment and avoidant attachment (Fraley, 2019). Avoidant attachment is characterized by difficulty in forming close connections or relying on others, while anxious attachment involves an intense desire for closeness and fears that one's partner may not reciprocate their feelings or commitment (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Insecure attachment is consistently linked to lower relationship satisfaction (Candel & Turliuc, 2019), lower sexual satisfaction, and higher levels of sexual dysfunction (Stefanou & McCabe, 2012). While no studies have directly examined the relationship between insecure attachment and the perceived consequences of sexual compliance, research has explored its association with the frequency of compliance. One study found that anxious attachment is associated with more compliance to sexting, although the association was mediated by avoidance motives (Drouin & Tobin, 2014). High levels of fearful avoidance (i.e., a combination of both anxious and avoidant attachment) are associated with greater sexual compliance (Favez & Tissot, 2019). Impett and Peplau (2002) found that women with anxious attachment are more likely to comply to sex compared with women with less anxious attachment. Although these studies do not explicitly address the consequences of sexual compliance, some authors suggest that frequent sexual compliance may have negative implications. For example, Drouin and Tobin (2014) argued that sexual compliance can be seen as a form of coercion, potentially leading to long-term repercussions.

There are additional aspects central to sexual and intimate well-being that can be motivated research targets. Previous research has found negative associations between sexual satisfaction and depression and anxiety (Karakose et al., 2023), and it is feasible that symptoms of depression and/or anxiety can help explain a negative perception of sexual compliance outcomes as well. Anhedonia is a symptom of depression, and irritability and edginess are symptoms of anxiety (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), which can be associated with a negative perception of the consequences of sexual compliance. Furthermore, experiencing sexual distress indicates a negative experience of sex in general, which can also be linked to perceiving negative consequences of compliance. Sexual distress is an important criterion for diagnosis of both male and female sexual dysfunctions (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). One study has found a link between women's reports of their partner being more interested in sex than themselves being a recurrent sexual problem and an experience of sexual distress (Witting et al., 2008). These speculations are in line with results from a qualitative study, where participants were asked to identify factors they believed influenced consequences of compliance, as some participants mentioned factors such as their own anxiety, depression, or shame related to sexuality (Gunst et al., 2024).

Other important aspects related to sexual well-being are sexual self-esteem and sexual assertiveness. Sexual self-esteem was mentioned as a predictor to perceived consequences of compliance by more than a third of the participants in the study by Gunst et al. (2024). Sexual self-esteem mediate the relationship between sexual function and sexual satisfaction (Peixoto et al., 2018), which highlights its importance in sexual well-being. In addition, about a fifth of participants in the Gunst et al. (2024) study reported that a lack of sexual assertiveness contributed to negative consequences of sexual compliance. Previous research has found that low sexual assertiveness is associated with more sexual compliance (Darden et al., 2019), and that sexual assertiveness can be a protective factor against sexual victimization (Kelley et al., 2016).

Relationship characteristics as predictors of perceived consequences of sexual compliance

Sexual compliance can be viewed as a response to an interdependence dilemma, arising from a conflict of interest when one partner desires sex and the other does not (Day et al., 2015). In monogamous relationships, where sexual activity is expected to occur exclusively in the partnership, interdependence is high when desires differ (Day et al., 2015). Research indicate that

trust is important in managing situations of conflicting interests, as trust is commonly defined as the belief that one's partner has benevolent motives (Balliet & Van Lange, 2013). Trust has been shown to moderate the responses to conflicting interests between partners; people with low trust tend to feel hurt and rejected following high-conflict situations, whereas those with high trust feel closer to the partner in similar situations (Murray et al., 2003). Although trust has not been directly studied in the context of sexual compliance, it is plausible that trust could act as a predictor of the perceived consequences of compliance.

By definition, sexual compliance excludes instances of coerced sex. However, coercion may still occur outside of compliant sexual encounters, potentially influencing how individuals perceive the consequences of sexual compliance. Katz and Tirone (2010) found that sexually coercive behavior from a partner was associated with increased compliance in women, which, in turn, was associated with less sexual satisfaction—particularly in women with more sexually coercive partners. Vannier and O'Sullivan (2010) speculated on whether sexual compliance is perceived differently in relationships with a history of coercive behavior, noting that many of their participants described instances of feeling pressured by their partners. They suggested that future research should explore this connection further.

Sexual communication with one's partner has positive associations with both sexual satisfaction and relationship quality (Frederick et al., 2017; Mallory, 2022), and frequent sexual communication is even associated with increased orgasm frequency in women (Jones et al., 2018). The importance of communication in the context of compliance was endorsed in the study by Gunst et al. (2024), where almost half of the participants reported that good communication contributes to positive consequences of sexual compliance, while poor communication leads to negative consequences of sexual compliance. Communicating with one's partner can be used as a mitigation strategy for dealing with desire discrepancy in a relationship, and was found to be a better strategy for increasing sexual and relationship satisfaction compared to doing nothing (Vowels & Mark, 2020). Based on these results, it is feasible that successful sexual communication can have a positive influence on the perceived consequences of compliance.

Aims and hypotheses

The aim of the present study was to explore the predictors of the perceived consequences of sexual compliance. Most of the previous studies on the topic have relied on convenience samples, predominantly consisting of women and young adults in relatively short-term relationships, which limits the generalizability of the research. We wanted to extend previous research by including several predictors in the same model and by using a population-based sample of adults. We also wanted to divide our sample based on gender to explore gender-specific variations in the predictors of perceived consequences of sexual compliance. We chose to include predictors based on different theoretical frameworks and previous studies. We expected approach motives, dyadic trust, sexual self-efficacy, sexual self-esteem, and comfort with dyadic sexual communication to be associated with more perceived positive consequences and less perceived negative consequences of sexual compliance. We expected insecure anxious or avoidant attachment, previous experiences of sexual coercion from partner, avoidance motives for sex, sexual distress, low sexual assertiveness, and symptoms of depression and/or anxiety to be associated with more perceived negative consequences and less perceived positive consequences of sexual compliance.

Methods

Procedure

The sample in the present study stems from a Finnish population-based data collection carried out between September and October of 2023. Potential participants were randomly selected by the Digital and Population Data Service Agency of Finland, which maintains the Finnish

population registry. People aged between 18 and 50 who were permanent residents of Finland and whose mother tongue were Finnish or Swedish were selected to participate. Invitations to participate in the data collection were sent out by post. A total of 30,000 people were invited to participate: 20,000 men and 10,000 women (the Finnish population register currently only recognizes two genders). We invited more men than women to participate because we wanted a balanced gender distribution in our sample, and typically fewer men have participated in similar Finnish research (Johansson et al., 2013; Tybur et al., 2020). The invitation letters contained information about the data collection as well as a QR code and a URL to the survey, which was created using a secure online platform. As an incentive to participate, the participants could choose to take part in a lottery of 30 gift cards worth 25€ each. More information on the data collection can be found in Nickull et al. (2025).

A definition of relevant concepts was included in the survey before the relevant survey questions. The definition of sexual compliance, sexual activity, and sexual desire presented to the participants were the following:

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 desire means being interested in and personally motivated to engage in sexual activity, with or without physical reactions (e.g., erection, tingling, lubrication). Sexual activity means a broad range of sexual behaviors which can include, for instance, petting/touching of genitals, oral sex, or penetrative sex.

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 current study prior to the data collection. Potential participants were asked to give informed consent prior to participation, in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. They were informed that participation was completely voluntary, and that they could cancel their participation at any time without giving a reason for doing so. Participants also consented to the sharing of anonymized data via an open data repository.

Participants

A total of 2,163 people responded to the survey, generating a response rate of 7.2%. We excluded all participants who did not have at least one partner at the time of the data collection ($n=537$) and those in some type of relationship who had never had sex ($n=17$) or had not had sex with their current partner ($n=11$). Participants had not yet been presented with our definition of sexual activity, so they answered based on their personal understanding of the term. Participants with multiple partners were asked to consider their primary or longest relationship when answering the questions. A total of 85.5% had complied to sex with their current partner at least once, and the rest were also excluded ($n=232$). There were 12 participants who had answered that they had never complied to sex in their life, but that they had complied to sex with their current partner, and as their responses did not make logical sense, we decided to exclude them as well. Finally, we excluded all participants who dropped out at any point during the survey ($n=399$) as they had missing data on one or more of the included measures. The participants identifying as belonging to a gender minority were too few to compare as a separate group ($n=7$) and were therefore excluded. In total, 948 participants were included in the final sample. The mean age of the participants was 34.1 years ($SD=8.9$), and the mean duration of their relationship was 8.9 years ($SD=8.0$). Only 3.2% of participants reported having complied once with their current partner ($n=30$), while 30.9% reported having complied a handful times ($n=293$), 27.7% a few dozen times ($n=263$), and 38.2% reported having complied more than a hundred times with their current partner ($n=362$). For more information on the final sample, see Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information about the participants.

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Woman	499	52.6
Man	449	47.4
Sexual orientation		
Heterosexual	809	85.3
Bisexual	91	9.6
Gay/lesbian	12	1.3
Pansexual	23	2.4
Asexual	4	0.4
Other	9	0.9
Relationship status		
Sex partner	27	2.8
Dating partner	29	3.1
Committed partner	793	83.6
Several sex/dating partners	30	3.2
Several committed partners	5	0.5
One committed partner and (sometimes) other dating and/or sex partners	62	6.5
Several committed partners and (sometimes) other dating and/or sex partners	2	0.2
Education		
Middle/junior high school (9 years)	29	3.1
Vocational school or high school (12 years)	369	38.9
Bachelor's degree (applied or university)	332	35.0
Master's degree (applied or university)	199	21.0
Licentiate/doctorate degree	19	2.0
Occupation		
Studying	166	17.5
Employed or self-employed	707	74.6
Retired	12	1.3
Unemployed	33	3.5
Other	30	3.2
Monthly gross income		
Less than 500€	77	8.1
500–999€	77	8.1
1,000–1,999€	105	11.1
2,000–2,999€	251	26.5
3,000–3,999€	198	20.9
4,000–4,999€	117	12.3
5,000–5,999€	75	7.9
6,000€ or more	48	5.1
Nationality		
Finnish	946	99.8
Other	2	0.2

Note. *N* = 948.

Measures

Perceived consequences of sexual compliance

The perceived consequences of sexual compliance were measured using the Consequences of Sexual Compliance Scale (Nickull et al., 2025). The scale consists of a total of 20 items divided equally into two subscales, one measuring perceived positive consequences of sexual compliance and one measuring perceived negative consequences of sexual compliance. Participants were asked which of the items they had experienced as a result of complying to sex with their current partner in the last three months, on a scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*all of the time*). Examples of perceived positive consequences are “Your relationship improved” or “The sex was pleasurable”, and perceived negative consequences are “The amount of tension in your relationship increased” or “You experienced physical discomfort during sex”. The items were summarized to create the two subscales with scores ranging from 10 to 50, with higher scores indicating more experienced consequences. Internal consistency was excellent for the subscale measuring perceived positive consequences (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.92$) and good for the subscale measuring perceived negative consequences (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.83$) in the present sample.

Predictors of perceived consequences of sexual compliance

Approach and avoidance motives for sex. Sexual motives were measured using a scale developed by Muise et al. (2013), based on Cooper et al. (1998). The measure consists of two subscales of 6 items each: one subscale measuring approach motives for having sex (e.g., to express love for my partner) and one subscale measuring avoidance motives for having sex (e.g., to avoid conflict in my relationship). Responses were scored from 1 (*never or very rarely*) to 5 (*always or almost always*). We created separate sum scores for approach and avoidance motives with ranges from 6 to 30, with higher scores indicating more frequent approach/avoidance motives for sex. The approach motive subscale had acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.75$), and the avoidance motive subscale had good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.87$) in the present sample.

Sexual self-efficacy. Sexual self-efficacy was measured using the “control” subscale of the Sexual Self-Esteem Inventory-Short Form (Zeanah & Schwarz, 2019). The control subscale measures the ability to manage one's sexual thoughts, feelings, and interactions (Zeanah & Schwarz, 1996). The short form of the subscale consists of seven items, which were rated on a Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). An example of an item is “I feel I can usually judge how my partner will regard my wishes about how far to go sexually”. A sum score was created with a range from 7 to 42. Some items were reversed so that higher scores indicated more experienced sexual self-efficacy. Internal consistency was acceptable in the current sample (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.79$).

Attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance. To measure insecure attachment, we used the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale-Short Form (Wei et al., 2007). The scale consists of 12 items, six of which measure insecure avoidant attachment and six of which measure insecure anxious attachment. An example of an item on the avoidant attachment subscale is “I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back”, and an item on the anxious subscale is “I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner”. Responses were rated on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Two separate sum scores were calculated, one for insecure anxious attachment and one for insecure avoidant attachment, both with ranges from 6 to 42. Four items were reversed so that higher scores indicated more insecure attachment for each subscale. Both the avoidant attachment subscale (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.73$) and the anxious attachment subscale (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.74$) had acceptable internal consistency in the present sample.

Symptoms of depression and anxiety. Symptoms of depression and anxiety were measured using the depression and anxiety subscales of the Brief Symptom Inventory (Derogatis & Melisaratos, 1983). Each subscale consists of six items. Participants were asked to what extent they had experienced each of the following symptoms in the past 7 days. For example, symptoms of depression included “Feeling lonely” and “Thoughts of ending your life”, and symptoms of anxiety included “Feeling tense or keyed up” and “Spells of terror and panic”. Responses were given on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*). Two sum scores were calculated, one for symptoms of depression and one for symptoms of anxiety, with higher scores indicating more symptoms. The correlation of the sum scores was high ($r=0.78$), so we decided to combine them and calculate a sum score of both subscales with scores ranging from 12 to 60. The internal consistency of the combined score was excellent in the present sample (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.93$).

Sexual distress. We used an abbreviated version of the Female Sexual Distress Scale—Revised to measure sexual distress (Derogatis, 2019). The same abbreviated scale has been used in previous research (e.g., Huang et al., 2023; Witting et al., 2008), and consists of seven gender-neutral items. Participants were asked how often in the past 30 days, including today, they have been bothered by problems such as “stressed about sex” and “dissatisfied with your sex life”. Participants rated their answers on a scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*), and a sum score was created with scores

ranging from 7 to 35, for which higher scores indicated greater sexual distress. The scale had excellent internal consistency in the present sample (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.91$).

Sexual self-esteem. An abbreviated version of the sexual-esteem subscale from the Sexuality Scale (Snell & Papini, 1989) was used to measure sexual self-esteem. The sexual-esteem subscale originally consists of 10 items, but to reduce the number of questions included in the survey, it was decided to abbreviate it and keep only four items. The items retained were: "I am a good sexual partner", "I would rate my sexual skill quite highly", "I am not very confident in sexual encounters", and "I sometimes doubt my sexual competence". Participants responded on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). A sum score was created with a range from 4 to 16. Two of the items were reversed so that higher scores indicated more sexual confidence. The internal consistency of the abbreviated subscale was good in the present sample (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.82$).

Sexual assertiveness. We measured sexual assertiveness using the sexual assertiveness subscale of the Sexual Awareness Questionnaire (Snell et al., 2019). The subscale consists of seven items, such as "I do not hesitate to ask for what I want in a sexual relationship", and was rated on a Likert scale from 1 (*not at all characteristic of me*) to 5 (*very characteristic of me*). A sum score was created with a range from 7 to 35, and two items were reversed so that a higher score indicated greater sexual assertiveness. The scale had good internal consistency in the current sample (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.86$).

Dyadic sexual communication. Sexual communication was measured using an abbreviated version of the Dyadic Sexual Communication Scale (Catania, 2019). The abbreviated version of the scale, consisting of five items, has also been used in previous research (Nickull et al., 2022). Items include, for example, "Talking about sex is a satisfying experience for both of us". Participants responded on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). A sum score was created with a range from 5 to 30. Two items were reversed so that higher scores indicated greater comfort with dyadic sexual communication. The scale had acceptable internal consistency in the present sample (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.77$).

Dyadic trust. Partner trust was measured using the Dyadic Trust Scale (Larzelere & Huston, 1980). The scale consists of eight items, such as "my partner treats me fairly and justly" and "I feel that I can trust my partner completely", and responses were rated on a scale from 1 (*very strongly disagree*) to 7 (*very strongly agree*). A sum score was created with a range from 8 to 56. Three items were reversed so that higher scores indicate more trust in the partner. The scale had good internal consistency in the present sample (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.85$).

Partner's sexual coercion. The frequency with which participants felt coerced into having sex with their partner was measured using items from the Commitment subscale of the Sexual Coercion in Intimate Relationship Scale (Goetz & Shackelford, 2019). We shortened the original subscale to keep the final survey as short as possible for the sake of the participants. We also changed all the references to "him" in the scale to "them", to make the scale gender neutral. Participants were asked how often in the past month the following acts had occurred in their current relationship, with five items such as "My partner made me feel obligated to have sex with them". Responses were given on a Likert scale from 1 (*did not occur in the past month*) to 6 (*act occurred 11 or more times in the past month*). A sum score was created with a range from 5 to 30, where higher scores indicated more experiences of sexual coercion by the current partner. The scale had acceptable internal consistency in the current sample (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.75$).

Statistical analysis

Data were analyzed using multiple regression models. We first used G*Power 3.1.9.7 to perform power analyses and set the effect size to moderate ($f^2=0.15$), the power to 80%, and the alpha level to 0.05. Using *a priori* power analysis for 12 predictors, we found that we would need a sample size of 127 participants to detect moderately sized effects. To detect a small effect ($f^2=0.02$), we would need a sample size of 865. Our final sample sizes were 499 women and 449 men, which means that we only had sufficient power to detect moderate effects. A sensitivity analysis using the same estimates revealed that we would be able to discover effect sizes of $f^2=0.04$ for both women and men. Although we did not have sufficient power to detect small effects, we chose to continue with the analysis as planned, as we wanted to explore the predictors separately for cisgender men and women. We calculated the effect size f^2 for all significant predictors in both multiple regression analyses according to Selya et al. (2012) recommendations, and interpreted the results according to guidelines by Cohen (1992), so that 0.02 is considered a small effect, 0.15 a moderate effect, and 0.35 a large effect.

We used IBM SPSS Statistics 29.0 to perform the analyses. Four separate regression analyses were performed; two for cis men and two for cis women, with perceived positive consequences or perceived negative consequences of sexual compliance as the outcome variables. Due to the limited generalizability of previous studies, we chose not to use hierarchical models, as we felt there was insufficient theory or prior knowledge to motivate such a model. Therefore, we proceeded to use forced entry for all regression analyses. We checked the assumptions for linear regression before proceeding with the analysis and found that no VIF values were above 2 in any analysis, and no tolerance values were below the recommended cutoff of 0.1, indicating that there were no problems with multicollinearity in our analysis.

We used Cook's distance when checking for influential cases, with the aim to exclude any cases that would deviate too much from the others. For the regression analyses with negative consequences as the outcome variable, the largest Cook's distance was 0.22 for women and 0.35 for men. The cases with the largest Cook's distances for both men and women deviated some from the rest, but since none of the participants' answers were unrealistic we opted to keep them in the analyses (Figures S1 and S2 in Supplementary Material). For the analysis of the positive consequences, the largest Cook's distance was 0.055 for women and 0.078 for men. Neither of these deviated too far from the rest (Figures S3 and S4 in Supplementary Material), and we concluded that we did not have a problem with influential cases in regression analyses with perceived positive consequences as the outcome variable.

Results

Descriptive information of the scales can be found in Table 2. Both men, $t(448)=51.9$, $p<.001$, $d=2.5$, and women, $t(498)=44.3$, $p<.001$, $d=2.0$, perceived significantly more positive than negative consequences of sexual compliance, with large effect sizes.

An overview of the correlations between the study variables can be found in Table 3. The strongest correlations between variables were 0.58 for women and 0.55 for men (between sexual assertiveness and sexual self-esteem), suggesting that the included variables can be assumed to measure different constructs.

Predictors of perceived positive consequences of sexual compliance

Predictors for cis women

The results of the regression analysis for women with perceived positive consequences of sexual compliance as the outcome variable are shown in Table 4. The model was significant, $F(12, 498)=21.4$, $p<001$, and explained 38% of the variance in the outcome variable, which can be considered a large effect ($f^2=0.60$). Four predictors were significant; having approach motives

Table 2. Descriptive information of included variables.

Variable	Women		Men		Range	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Positive consequences	36.6	9.1	37.8	8.8	10–50	0.14*
Negative consequences	13.8	4.4	12.7	3.3	10–50	0.27**
Approach motives for sex	20.8	4.2	21.9	4.1	6–30	0.25**
Avoidance motives for sex	10.2	4.5	9.7	4.2	6–30	0.12
Sexual self-efficacy	33.9	5.6	36.3	4.4	7–42	0.48**
Sexual self-esteem	11.0	2.5	11.9	2.3	4–16	0.35**
Sexual assertiveness	22.1	5.7	23.4	5.0	7–35	0.24**
Dyadic sexual communication	22.3	5.1	22.4	5.2	5–30	0.01
Dyadic trust	44.8	9.1	45.2	7.4	8–56	0.06
Symptoms of anxiety/depression	24.6	10.4	22.6	9.1	12–60	0.20*
Sexual distress	13.9	6.1	12.7	5.5	7–35	0.20*
Partner's sexual coercion	5.8	2.1	5.5	1.7	5–24	0.14*
Anxious attachment	22.9	6.9	19.9	6.7	6–42	0.44**
Avoidant attachment	13.7	5.4	14.4	5.3	6–42	0.13

Note. ** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$, $N = 499$ for women and $N = 449$ for men. Range is the total range for the scale. Higher scores indicate more experience of the variable in question.

for sex and dyadic communication were positively associated with perceived positive consequences of compliance, and sexual distress and an avoidant attachment style were negatively associated with the perceived positive consequences of compliance. Approach motives had a moderate effect ($f^2 = 0.13$), whereas the other predictors had weak effects ($f^2 = 0.01$).

Predictors for cis men

The results of the regression analysis for men with perceived positive consequences as the outcome variable are shown in Table 5. The model for men was also significant, $F(12, 448) = 16.3$, $p < .001$, and explained 31% of the variance in the perceived positive consequences of sexual compliance, which is also considered a large effect ($f^2 = 0.45$). Four predictors were significant in the model for men; having approach motives for sex and sexual self-esteem were positively associated with the perceived positive consequences of sexual compliance, and experiencing sexual distress or having an avoidant attachment was negatively associated with the perceived positive consequences of sexual compliance. The effect of approach motives was again moderate ($f^2 = 0.13$), whereas the effects of the other predictors were small (between $f^2 = 0.1$ and 0.2).

Predictors of perceived negative consequences of sexual compliance

Predictors for cis women

The results of the regression analysis with perceived negative consequences of sexual compliance as the outcome variable for the women are shown in Table 6. The model was significant, $F(12, 498) = 30.0$, $p < .001$, and explained 43% of the variance in the outcome variable, which can be considered a large effect ($f^2 = 0.74$). Six predictors were significant; partner's sexual coercion, sexual distress, avoidance motives for sex, and sexual self-esteem were positively associated with perceived negative consequences of compliance, and sexual self-efficacy and approach motives for sex were negatively associated with the perceived negative consequences of compliance. All effects were weak, but partner's sexual coercion ($f^2 = 0.06$), sexual distress ($f^2 = 0.05$), and having avoidance motives for sex ($f^2 = 0.04$) were stronger than the other significant predictors ($f^2 = 0.01$).

Predictors for cis men

The results of the regression analysis for men with perceived positive consequences as the outcome variable are shown in Table 7. The model for men was also significant, $F(12, 448) = 17.6$, $p < .001$, and explained 33% of the variance in the perceived negative consequences of sexual

Table 3. Correlations between study variables.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Negative consequences	--	-0.29**	-0.05	0.30**	-0.25**	0.20**	0.26**	0.30**	0.46**	-0.21**	-0.20**	-0.22**	-0.37**	0.39**
2. Positive consequences	-0.38**	--	0.40**	-0.07	0.21**	-0.09	-0.32**	-0.19**	-0.32**	0.29**	0.30**	0.33**	0.29**	-0.18**
3. Approach motives	-0.08	0.43**	--	0.04	0.07	0.09	-0.22**	-0.05	-0.03	0.09	0.13**	0.16**	0.16**	-0.15**
4. Avoidance motives	0.50**	-0.15**	0.14**	--	-0.25**	0.18**	0.30**	0.27**	0.33**	-0.18**	-0.12*	-0.18**	-0.31**	0.33**
5. Sexual self-efficacy	-0.42**	0.32**	0.09	-0.39**	--	-0.41**	-0.30**	-0.36**	-0.42**	0.48**	0.32**	0.31**	0.27**	-0.17**
6. Anxious attachment	0.24**	-0.06	0.13**	0.23**	-0.34**	--	0.21**	0.41**	0.34**	-0.19**	-0.09	-0.23**	-0.38**	0.00
7. Avoidant attachment	0.32**	-0.37**	-0.18**	0.32**	-0.43**	0.22**	--	0.25**	0.30**	-0.24**	-0.30**	-0.37**	-0.44**	0.22**
8. Depression/anxiety	0.34**	-0.19**	0.04	0.36**	-0.45**	0.48**	0.32**	--	0.47**	-0.32**	-0.22*	-0.23**	-0.32**	0.13**
9. Sexual distress	0.50**	-0.36**	-0.06	0.48**	-0.48**	0.29**	0.37**	0.48**	--	-0.44**	-0.40**	-0.46**	-0.43**	0.25**
10. Sexual self-esteem	-0.15**	0.29**	0.13**	-0.25**	0.33**	-0.16**	-0.22*	-0.20**	-0.34**	--	0.55*	0.39**	0.21**	-0.16**
11. Sexual assertiveness	-0.22**	0.30**	0.15**	-0.28**	0.28**	-0.04	-0.23**	-0.09	-0.33**	0.58**	--	0.49**	0.21**	-0.09
12. Dyadic communication	-0.33**	0.43**	0.24**	-0.33**	0.34**	-0.12**	-0.42**	-0.21**	-0.47**	0.35**	0.53**	--	0.37**	-0.17**
13. Dyadic trust	-0.40**	0.33**	0.17**	-0.45**	0.35**	-0.27**	-0.52**	-0.30**	-0.39**	0.12**	0.19**	0.42**	--	-0.24**
14. Partner's coercion	0.48**	-0.15**	-0.00	0.51**	-0.31**	0.09*	0.25**	0.20**	0.31**	-0.06	-0.18**	-0.22**	-0.42**	--

Note. ** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$. Women's correlations are presented below the diagonal, and men's correlations are presented above the diagonal.

Table 4. Regression analysis of the women's perceived positive consequences of sexual compliance.

Effect	Estimate	β	95% CI		<i>p</i>
			LL	UL	
Approach motives for sex	0.685	0.320	0.517	0.852	< .001**
Dyadic sexual communication	0.261	0.146	0.089	0.432	.003*
Sexual distress	-0.211	-0.142	-0.355	-0.069	.004*
Avoidant attachment	-0.179	-0.107	-0.328	-0.029	.019*
Sexual self-esteem	0.323	0.088	-0.013	0.660	.060
Dyadic trust	0.087	0.087	-0.008	0.182	.073
Sexual self-efficacy	0.138	0.085	-0.009	0.285	.065
Avoidance motives for sex	0.112	0.056	-0.081	0.306	.255
Anxious attachment	0.061	0.046	-0.049	0.172	.275
Sexual assertiveness	0.051	0.032	-0.103	0.205	.515
Symptoms of depression/ anxiety	-0.021	-0.024	-0.100	0.058	.604
Partner's sexual coercion	-0.014	-0.003	-0.385	0.357	.942

Note. ** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$. Total $N = 499$. CI: confidence interval; LL: lower limit; UL: upper limit. The variables have been arranged from the largest standardized effect to the smallest, to increase readability.

Table 5. Regression analysis of the men's perceived positive consequences of sexual compliance.

Effect	Estimate	β	95% CI		<i>p</i>
			LL	UL	
Approach motives for sex	0.670	0.316	0.493	0.848	< .001**
Sexual distress	-0.261	-0.162	-0.433	-0.089	.003*
Avoidant attachment	-0.204	-0.123	-0.361	-0.048	.011*
Sexual self-esteem	0.399	0.105	0.001	0.797	.049*
Dyadic trust	0.095	0.080	-0.022	0.212	.112
Dyadic sexual communication	0.136	0.080	-0.033	0.304	.115
Avoidance motives for sex	0.156	0.075	-0.030	0.343	.101
Sexual assertiveness	0.090	0.051	-0.090	0.271	.326
Partner's sexual coercion	-0.187	-0.036	-0.642	0.268	.420
Sexual self-efficacy	0.138	0.085	-0.009	0.285	.657
Anxious attachment	0.021	0.016	-0.106	0.148	.750
Symptoms of depression/anxiety	0.002	0.002	-0.090	0.094	.964

Note. ** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$. Total $N = 449$. CI: confidence interval; LL: lower limit; UL: upper limit. The variables have been arranged from the largest standardized effect to the smallest, to increase readability.

Table 6. Regression analysis of the women's perceived negative consequences of sexual compliance.

Effect	Estimate	β	95% CI		<i>p</i>
			LL	UL	
Partner's sexual coercion	0.497	0.239	0.324	0.670	< .001**
Sexual distress	0.164	0.226	0.097	0.231	< .001**
Avoidance motives for sex	0.199	0.205	0.109	0.289	< .001**
Sexual self-efficacy	-0.090	-0.115	-0.159	-0.022	.010*
Sexual self-esteem	0.164	0.091	0.007	0.321	.041*
Approach motives for sex	-0.094	-0.090	-0.172	-0.016	.018*
Anxious attachment	0.040	0.062	-0.012	0.091	.130
Symptoms of depression/anxiety	0.013	0.031	-0.024	0.050	.484
Dyadic trust	-0.014	-0.029	-0.059	0.030	.531
Dyadic sexual communication	-0.025	-0.029	-0.105	0.055	.536
Sexual assertiveness	-0.021	-0.027	-0.093	0.051	.565
Avoidant attachment	0.002	0.003	-0.067	0.072	.948

Note. ** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$. Total $N = 499$. CI: confidence interval; LL: lower limit; UL: upper limit. The variables have been arranged from the largest standardized effect to the smallest, to increase readability.

compliance, which is also considered a large effect ($f^2 = 0.49$). Three predictors were significant in the model for men; sexual distress and partner's sexual coercion were positively associated with the perceived negative consequences of sexual compliance, and dyadic trust was negatively associated with the perceived negative consequences of sexual compliance. All effects were weak, but sexual distress ($f^2 = 0.07$) and partner's sexual coercion ($f^2 = 0.09$) had stronger effects compared to dyadic trust ($f^2 = 0.01$).

Table 7. Regression analysis of the men's perceived negative consequences of sexual compliance.

Effect	Estimate	β	95% CI		<i>p</i>
			LL	UL	
Sexual distress	0.172	0.285	0.108	0.235	<.001**
Partner's sexual coercion	0.535	0.272	0.367	0.704	<.001**
Dyadic trust	-0.064	-0.144	-0.107	-0.021	.004*
Symptoms of depression/anxiety	0.025	0.070	-0.009	0.059	.143
Dyadic sexual communication	0.036	0.057	-0.026	0.099	.253
Sexual assertiveness	-0.036	-0.054	-0.102	0.031	.297
Sexual self-esteem	0.067	0.047	-0.081	0.214	.374
Avoidance motives for sex	0.035	0.045	-0.024	0.104	.319
Avoidant attachment	0.019	0.030	-0.039	0.077	.523
Approach motives for sex	0.017	0.021	-0.049	0.083	.610
Anxious attachment	0.011	0.021	-0.036	0.058	.659
Sexual self-efficacy	-0.008	-0.011	-0.081	0.065	.826

Note. ** $p < .001$; * $p < .05$. Total $N = 449$. CI: confidence interval; LL: lower limit; UL: upper limit. The variables have been arranged from the largest standardized effect to the smallest, to increase readability.

Discussion

The present study aimed to identify potential predictors of perceived positive and negative consequences of sexual compliance. We included 12 predictors in our models, exploring the unique contribution of different personal and interpersonal aspects, such as sexual motivation, sexual self-image, and relationship dynamics. We used a Finnish population-based sample with a total of 948 participants and performed separate analyses by gender (cis men $n = 449$, cis women $n = 499$). The models accounted for 31–38% of the variance in perceived positive consequences and 33–43% of the variance in perceived negative consequences of sexual compliance. Although these are substantial amounts and large effects, more than half of the variance in the outcome variables remained unexplained. This suggests that there are still unexplored factors that are likely to play an important role in perceptions of sexual compliance. Future research should continue to explore other potential predictors of the perceived consequences of sexual compliance, such as cultural norms, personality traits, or body image. The effect sizes of individual predictors were moderate or small, and the discrepancy in effect size between the overall model and the predictors is likely due to shared variance between the predictors, meaning that their combined influence is greater than any one predictor alone. This again highlights the complexity of understanding the perceived consequences of sexual compliance.

Sexual compliance was prevalent in our sample, with 85% of our original sample having complied to sex with their current partner at least once, and 38% reported having complied more than 100 times with their current partner. This shows that compliance occurs in most intimate relationships and is a frequent event in many. These findings align with previous studies using convenience samples, which have found that 50–93% have complied with their current partner at least once (Himanen & Gunst, 2024; O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998; Quinn-Nilas & Kennett, 2018), and that 17% of all partnered sexual activity is considered as compliant (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010). The occurrence of sexual compliance appears to be the norm rather than the exception in intimate relationships, highlighting the need for awareness and discussion of its implications.

We also found that it was much more common to experience positive consequences of compliance compared to negative, contradicting previous studies that have found a more even division between positive and negative perceived consequences (Bay-Cheng & Bruns, 2016; Gunst et al., 2024; Himanen & Gunst, 2024; Katz & Tirone, 2009). It is important to note that our definition is broader than some previously used definitions (e.g., compliance to unwanted sex), as we chose to define compliance as “sex you initially do not desire”. This might contribute to the high frequency of compliance, and the general perception of positive

consequences of it. We also have a population-based sample with older adults in longer relationships than previously mentioned studies, which can help explain the results. The participants in our sample reported more approach motives (means were 61.7–66.3% of max score) than avoidance motives (means were 15.4–17.5% of max score), high trust in their partner (means were 76.7–77.5% of max score), and few symptoms of depression and/or anxiety (means were 22.1–26.3% of max score). This indicates that the participants in our sample had relatively high well-being and strong relationships, and that the results cannot necessarily be generalized to, for example, clinical samples.

The predictors of perceived positive consequences of sexual compliance

One of the most important predictors of the perceived positive consequences of sexual compliance was having approach motives for sex. This supports previous research using convenience samples (Day et al., 2015; Gunst et al., 2024; Himanen & Gunst, 2024; Katz & Tirone, 2009). Approach motives for sex have been previously studied based on interdependence theory (Day et al., 2015), and psychological theories of motivation (Katz & Tirone, 2009), and it is interesting to see that it remains an important predictor even when controlling for many other variables. Seeking pleasure or trying to satisfy a partner's needs is likely to mean going into the sexual experience with a positive mindset, which logically also affects how one perceives the consequences of that sexual experience. The tendency to notice information that matches what we already think, (i.e., confirmation bias) is one possible explanation for this association. It is also likely that the motives and perceived consequences reinforce each other; a positive experience of sexual compliance is likely to lead to more approach motives in the next situation of sexual compliance, which might make the experience positive again, and so on.

Avoidant attachment showed a weak negative association with the perceived positive consequences of sexual compliance, suggesting that a fear of closeness may reduce the perceived positive consequences of sexual compliance. Impett and Peplau (2002) found that avoidant attachment in college women was linked to a greater likelihood of passively complying to sex to fulfill relationship obligations. If this pattern translates to the general population as well, this passive approach may diminish the perception of positive consequences. Furthermore, attachment avoidance is associated with emotional suppression and inhibition of positive relationship experiences following sexual activity (Birnbaum et al., 2006; Garrison et al., 2012), which could also explain why avoidantly attached individuals experience fewer positive consequences from sexual compliance. Avoidant tendencies might overshadow potential benefits from sexual compliance, either by suppressing emotional responses or by preventing positive experiences from emerging in the first place.

Sexual distress also showed a weak negative association with the perceived positive consequences of sexual compliance, indicating that experiencing distress may hinder the positive perception of sexual compliance. Sexual pleasure and sexual distress are negatively correlated (Pascoal et al., 2020), and given that one of the items on the positive consequences subscale is “The sex was pleasurable”, the negative association between the variables is understandable. Sexual distress is also positively associated with brooding and reflection in responses to depressed mood, which in turn are associated with decreased sexual pleasure (Guerreiro et al., 2024), and it is therefore possible that distressed individuals focus more on the discomfort or relational strain associated with compliance than on potential benefits of it.

Predictors of perceived negative consequences of sexual compliance

Sexual distress was a weak but significant predictor in the models exploring perceived negative consequences of sexual compliance as well. Due to the cross-sectional nature of the data, we cannot make assumptions of causality, so we do not know if sexual distress leads to a negative

perception of consequences of sexual compliance or vice versa. One study using longitudinal data found that a sexual desire discrepancy on one day predicted sexual distress on the next day, and that a desire discrepancy also predicted increased sexual distress one year later, while the reverse associations were not significant (Jodouin et al., 2021). This link can potentially be explained by an increased tendency of having a negative perception of consequences of sexual compliance. Sexual distress is also associated with negative feelings toward the partner (Dennerstein et al., 2008), which can contribute to perceived negative consequences of sexual compliance.

Having a sexually coercive partner was significantly correlated with perceiving more negative consequences of sexual compliance. Vannier and O'Sullivan (2010) observed that many participants reported experiences of previous sexual coercion, apart from their experiences of sexual compliance. They suggested that participants might comply out of fear of being pressured if they say no, which might make sexual compliance in sexually coercive relationships qualitatively different from sexual compliance in relationships without sexual coercion. Our results are consistent with this hypothesis, as we found that having a sexually coercive partner was one of the strongest predictors of perceiving negative consequences of sexual compliance. Being coerced into having sex has more negative implications for psychological well-being than sexual compliance does (Kern & Peterson, 2020), and our findings suggest that the negative effects of sexual coercion may extend to situations of sexual compliance and raise the question of whether consent is truly freely given in such cases of sexual compliance.

Gender differences in predictors of perceived consequences of compliance

A few significant predictors differed between cisgender men and women, but overall, the effect sizes of these differing variables were weak. The variables with the largest effect sizes (i.e., approach motives for positive consequences and partner's sexual coercion and sexual distress for negative consequences) were consistent across both cisgender men and women. While there were many significant differences in the means of the predictor variables, the effect sizes were generally small or moderate. The largest differences were that men reported more sexual self-efficacy ($d=0.48$), and less anxious attachment ($d=0.44$) than women, both with moderate effects. The generally small effects indicate that gender differences should be interpreted cautiously, as they may be of limited practical significance. This aligns with the gender similarity hypothesis and previous research, which suggests that in regards to sexuality, the differences within genders are often greater than the differences between them (Petersen & Hyde, 2011).

Dyadic sexual communication emerged as a weak but significant predictor in the subsample of women, whereas it was not significant in the subsample of men. A previous qualitative study with a predominantly female sample identified communication as a key factor influencing perceptions of positive or negative consequences of compliance (Gunst et al., 2024). Research has also found that men and women may use sexual communication differently. For women, greater sexual communication leads to increased emotional intimacy, which in turn contributes to higher sexual satisfaction (MacNeil & Byers, 2005). In contrast, men use sexual communication more instrumentally to achieve more rewarding sexual experiences (MacNeil & Byers, 2005). These differences in how sexual communication is utilized can help explain its varying importance for the perceived consequences of sexual compliance.

More avoidance motives and fewer approach motives were associated with more perceived negative consequences of compliance for women, however, these associations were not significant for men. A previous study found that sexual motives had a stronger association with sexual satisfaction for women compared to men (Stephenson et al., 2011). The authors argued that women are more often seen as the gatekeepers of sexual activity in heterosexual relationships, which can lead to women's sexual motives having a greater influence on sexual

outcomes for both men and women (Stephenson et al., 2011). Our findings align with this, and future research could explore whether these associations hold in dyadic data as well.

Less dyadic trust was weakly associated with perceiving more negative consequences of compliance for men, whereas trust had no significant association with perceived negative consequences for women. According to interdependence theory, situations of conflicting interests (such as sexual compliance) can be viewed as “diagnostic situations”, as they reveal a partner’s intentions and pro-social behavior (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). In addition, men are more likely than women to lose trust and less likely to regain trust following a transgression (Haselhuhn et al., 2015). Taken together, if men experience less trust and the diagnostic situation fails to demonstrate their partners benevolence, they may be more likely to perceive negative consequences of sexual compliance.

Sexual self-efficacy was weakly associated with a reduced perception of negative consequences for women, whereas no such association was observed for men. Previous research on sexual resourcefulness and sexual compliance has focused exclusively on women (Himanen & Gunst, 2024; Kennett et al., 2009, 2013; Quinn-Nilas & Kennett, 2018), raising questions about the generalizability of these findings to men. One possible explanation for the gender disparity is that confidence in one’s ability to decline unwanted advances might help women better distinguish between genuinely unwanted sexual situations and “milder” instances of compliance. This discernment could help women avoid truly unwanted sexual situations, thereby reducing their perceived negative consequences. This effect may be more pronounced in women due to sexual scripts, which emphasize women’s roles as recipients of sexual activity, in contrast to men’s roles as initiators (Byers, 1996).

A finding that was inconsistent with our hypotheses was that more sexual self-esteem was weakly associated with more perceived negative consequences of sexual compliance in women, contrasting the fact that it was associated with more perceived positive consequences for men. Although the correlation between sexual self-esteem and perceived negative consequences was negative for both men and women, this association became positive for women when controlling for shared variance with other variables included in the regressions. It is possible that the unique contribution of the self-esteem variable reflects different underlying meanings for women compared to men.

Implications for research and clinical practice

There has been a call for more research on the treatment of desire discrepancy, as this is an important area for promoting sexual well-being in intimate relationships (Dewitte et al., 2020). The present study aims to contribute to filling this research gap. By analyzing the predictors of perceived consequences of sexual compliance, we hope to assist clinicians in discussing compliance with their clients, and to identify when sexual compliance is harmful and when it is beneficial. Our findings can guide clinicians in identifying key areas when discussing sexual compliance and help tailor their focus depending on whether they are addressing positive or negative consequences of compliance. Based on our results, clients with strong approach motives for sex may benefit from sexual compliance, however, if sexual distress is present, sexual compliance might be harmful. In addition, it is important to address any experiences of sexual coercion in the relationship, as these are significant predictors of perceived negative consequences of sexual compliance.

We also hope that our results can guide future research on the perceived consequences of sexual compliance. Our finding that experiencing sexual coercion from a partner may contribute to the perception of negative consequences of compliance might indicate that, despite the phrase “without coercion or manipulation” being included in the definition of sexual compliance, it may not be easy to distinguish between coercive and non-coercive sexual encounters. Fear of being coerced can act as a form of covert coercion, which is important to consider in future research.

Strengths, limitations, and future research

To our knowledge, this was the first study to explore the predictors of perceived consequences of sexual compliance using a large, population-based sample. Unfortunately, the response rate was low at 7.2%, which is significantly lower than a recent Finnish data collection involving twins and siblings of twins, where the response rate reached 29% (Tybur et al., 2020). However, this estimate is conservative, as invitations were sent out by post and the calculation assumes all letters were received. Due to budget constraints, we were unable to send reminder letters, which have likely contributed to higher response rates in similar studies (Tybur et al., 2020). Additional factors may have influenced the response rate, such as the survey length (the invitation said to reserve 40 minutes for participation), or the decision to invite a higher proportion of men than women to participate. When comparing the education levels of our participants to official Finnish data, our sample appears to be slightly more educated than the general population (Tilastokeskus, 2024). However, this is a common issue in population-based studies, even those with higher response rates (Johansson et al., 2013; Tybur et al., 2020). Research on sexuality surveys suggests that respondents may be slightly more likely than non-respondents to be sexually liberal, sexually active, and to have experienced adverse sexual events (Dunne et al., 1997). Nevertheless, these differences were small and unlikely to seriously bias the results (Dunne et al., 1997).

We included all participants with a current sexual partner in the final sample, encompassing individuals with casual sex partners, those in consensually non-monogamous relationships, and married individuals. This approach allowed us to retain as many participants as possible and describe the predictors of perceived consequences of sexual compliance in a diverse sample that represents the population. However, this inclusive approach also introduces limitations. The majority of participants were in committed monogamous relationships, allowing us to most accurately describe predictors within this context. It is possible that the unique characteristics of each relationship type influence the relevance of certain predictors, and future research could explore these potential variations. For example, commitment is consistently linked to the willingness to make sacrifices for the sake of a partner in close relationships (Righetti & Impett, 2017). In the compliance literature, sexual precedent is associated with perceiving compliant sex as more pleasurable compared to cases without prior sexual history (Willis et al., 2022), indicating that the dynamics of sexual compliance might change depending on the novelty of the sexual partner.

There were several limitations to our method. To gather comprehensive information on factors most relevant to the perception of consequences of sexual compliance, we included as many predictors as possible in our model. However, this approach limited our power to detect small effects, even with a relatively large sample. In addition, the measure of perceived consequences of sexual compliance relied on retrospective self-reports, which are likely less reliable than daily reports. The CSCS assesses the perceived consequences of sexual compliance over the past three months, but we lacked data on who had actually complied during that time. As a result, some reports of “no consequences” may simply reflect no compliance during the past three months. Finally, despite our best efforts to provide a clear definition, participants may have interpreted the concept of sexual compliance differently.

To our knowledge, this was the first population-based study that explored predictors of sexual compliance. More representative data are needed to confirm the findings of this study. Future research should also investigate predictors of sexual compliance using longitudinal designs, both in daily contexts and over longer periods. A qualitative study has reported both short-term and long-term consequences of sexual compliance (Gunst et al., 2024), which should be explored on a larger scale. In addition, it would be valuable to explore some of the gender differences observed in this study using dyadic data in future research.

Conclusions

The present study explored the predictors of the perceived consequences of sexual compliance in a large, Finnish, population-based sample. The strongest predictor of perceived positive

consequences was having approach motives for sex, when controlling for all other predictors. The strongest predictors for perceived negative consequences of sexual compliance were having felt coerced to have sex by the partner in the past month and having experiences of sexual distress. There were slight variations in significant predictors for men and women, but the effects were generally small. The findings can guide clinicians working with couples with discrepancies in sexual desire to identify key focus areas in a clinical context.

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ORCID

Sabina Nickull  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9733-7165>

Patrick Jern  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9044-7604>

Caoyuan Niu  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2195-0710>

Marianne Källström  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1522-3771>

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, SN, upon reasonable request.

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