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Sexual Compliance in Finnish Committed Relationships: Sexual Self-Control, Relationship Power, and Experienced Consequences

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ABSTRACT

We studied sexual compliance (i.e., consensual engagement in partnered sexual activity despite lack of sexual desire) in committed relationships using a large Finnish sample. First, we tested if previous theories on sexual self-control and partner sexual relationship power could be extended to a Finnish setting. As little is known about the personal and relational consequences of compliance, we also explored the experienced consequences and their association with the aforementioned aspects. The convenience survey sample (n = 1,496) included individuals who were or had recently been in committed intimate relationships. As 93% of the participants were women, our analyses focused on these (64.3% heterosexual, 24.5% bisexual, 11.3% other). Sixty-five percent of women reported having complied at least once in their current or most recent relationship. Women with lower sexual self-control and higher *partner* sexual relationship power reported more compliance, corroborating previous research. Lower age was uniquely associated with more compliance, whereas the association between more compliance and lower education diminished when including sexual self-control and partner sexual relationship power in the regression model. Experienced consequences of compliance varied greatly among women. However, roughly two-fifths reported only negative consequences for their well-being and relationships. Fewer approach motives, more avoidance motives, lower sexual self-control, and higher partner relationship control were associated with experiencing fewer positive consequences. Our results corroborate previous studies conducted in North America, suggesting that sexual compliance is common among women in committed relationships. We suggest careful consideration in instances of compliance, considering possible negative consequences.

Individuals in committed long-term intimate relationships often face the issue of sexual desire discrepancy, that is, a mismatch in desire for sexual activities, whether on a fluctuating day-to-day basis or in the longer term (Dewitte et al., 2020). Consequently, there are many situations in which one of the partners must decide whether to participate in sexual activity despite not desiring it. Sexual compliance is defined as consensual engagement in partnered sexual activity despite the lack of sexual desire (e.g., Morgan et al., 2006). It includes the absence of immediate partner pressure, such as physical or psychological coercion, and thus differentiates sexual compliance from sexual coercion and assault (Quinn-Nilas & Kennett, 2018).

Who Complies and Why?

Sexual compliance seems to be common in committed long-term relationships. For instance, in their sample of U.S. young adults, Vannier and O'Sullivan (2010) found that 46% of individuals in committed heterosexual relationships had complied to sexual activity at least once. Similar percentages have been found in other studies examining young adults in committed heterosexual relationships (e.g., Katz & Tirone, 2009, 2010). In contrast, Willis et al. (2020) found that in their U.S. sample of young adults, only 3% of the participants reported sexual compliance with their most recent, novel sexual partner. Moreover, in a study by Katz and Schneider (2015), only 10% of those who reported sexual compliance in a committed relationship reported sexual compliance also in a casual, non-committed relationship. The motives for compliance also seem to differ between committed and non-committed relationships. For instance, alcohol intoxication has been reported as the most common reason for sexual compliance in novel sexual relationships (Willis et al., 2020), whereas in committed relationships, the most commonly reported motives have been related to endeavors of maintaining the relationship (e.g., avoiding an argument or wanting to fulfill a partner's sexual needs; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010). Considering these findings, it is possible that sexual compliance becomes especially relevant in the context of committed relationships because of an effort to sustain the relationship. However, it is unclear whether this effort unequivocally leads to favorable outcomes, even if the relationship is sustained.

The pioneering studies on sexual compliance found that sexual compliance in heterosexual dating relationships is more common in women than in men (O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998; Sprecher et al., 1994). Since then, most sexual compliance studies have focused on women and the endeavor to understand and explain women's sexual compliance (e.g., Conroy et al., 2015; Darden et al., 2019; Quinn-Nilas &

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Kennett, 2018). However, in their Canadian sample of 124 men, Quinn-Nilas et al. (2013) found that 89% had complied sexually (e.g., to kissing, dancing, or giving oral sex) at some point in their life, which is consistent with recent findings for women (Quinn-Nilas & Kennett, 2018). Moreover, a study including participants in different marginalized (e.g., LGBTQ, BDSM, polyamorous) relationships (Rubinsky, 2020) found that roughly 44% of participants had consented to unwanted sexual activities with their current partner, indicating that compliance is common also in relationships outside traditional notions of gender roles.

Demographic aspects, such as age (see e.g., Katz & Schneider, 2015; Katz & Tirone, 2010; Kennett et al., 2009; Quinn-Nilas & Kennett, 2018) and relationship duration (Kennett et al., 2009, 2013; Quinn-Nilas & Kennett, 2018), seem to be unrelated to sexual compliance. However, the referenced samples consisted of young college or university students, limiting the sample's age and relationship duration range. This is also why the association between sexual compliance and, for example, education level has not been considered. More diverse samples are needed to make more confident conclusions about who complies and why.

Sexual Self-Control

Kennett et al. (2009) formed a model to investigate an aspect of sexual decision-making processes that might explain sexual compliance. They based their theory on Rosenbaum's (1990, 2000) self-control model – the idea that people manage the demands and challenges of everyday life by self-regulating their behavior with psychosocial skills. Their model, which they named the sexual self-control model, includes three factors: *sexual resourcefulness* (i.e., specific strategies such as instructive positive self-talk, communicating with one's partner, and planning how to deal with unwanted sexual advances), *sexual self-efficacy* (i.e., one's belief of being able to turn down an unwanted sexual advance and control sexual settings), and *reasons for consenting to unwanted sexual activities* (i.e., the motives an individual has for consenting to unwanted sexual activity).

Lower levels of sexual resourcefulness (Kennett et al., 2009, 2013; Quinn-Nilas & Kennett, 2018), self-efficacy (Kennett et al., 2013), and more reasons for consenting (Quinn-Nilas & Kennett, 2018) have been associated with more sexual compliance in women. In the only study looking at sexual self-control and sexual compliance in men, lower sexual resourcefulness and self-efficacy were not associated with more sexual compliance (Quinn-Nilas et al., 2013). However, more reasons for consenting were associated with more frequent sexual compliance in men, despite the level of sexual resourcefulness.

In summary, the findings on self-control and sexual compliance in women imply that the model is relevant to investigating sexual decision-making in unwanted sexual settings, at least in women.

Partner Sexual Relationship Power

Another aspect investigated in the context of sexual compliance is partner sexual relationship power. Conroy et al. (2015) questioned whether occasions of sexual compliance are always free of pressure or coercion, even though immediate partner pressure is not perceived. They suggested that an indirect form of coercion, covert sexual coercion, due to experiencing pressure to follow social and cultural sex role obligations, can affect the decision to consent to unwanted sexual activity, especially in women. Conroy et al. (2015) approached sexual compliance using a feminist theoretical framework, recognizing that the context where sexual negotiations take place is a patriarchal culture. Societal expectations and gender socialization imply that women adopt a sexually passive role and value their sexual desires secondary to those of men (Bay-Cheng & Eliseo-Arras, 2008). Additionally, essential to the feminist theory is the assumption that in a patriarchal culture, men hold more social power than women outside of as well as within intimate relationships (Smith et al., 2009). Conroy et al. (2015) examined this power imbalance and found that higher *partner* sexual relationship power (i.e., experiencing less social power in the committed relationship compared to the partner) was associated with more sexual compliance in women.

Experienced Consequences of Sexual Compliance

There is surprisingly little empirical knowledge about the personal and relational consequences of sexual compliance. A few studies suggest that sexual compliance might negatively affect the individual's well-being. For instance, one cross-sectional study showed that sexual compliance was associated with higher cortisol levels (Hartmann & Crockett, 2016), suggesting that stress is involved in situations of sexual compliance. Other studies have suggested that compliance predicts emotional discomfort (O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998) and lower enjoyment of the sexual encounter (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010). Additionally, sexually submissive behavior, including sexual compliance, has been associated with lower sexual satisfaction when it conflicts with personal desires (i.e., when the individual has no interest in partner dominance; Sanchez et al., 2012).

On the other hand, sexual compliance is frequently suggested as a viable strategy for dealing with desire discrepancy in the relationship (Herbenick et al., 2014). Sexual compliance can maintain a committed relationship by, for example, sustaining harmony (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010). Moreover, individuals in long-term relationships often report that their desire is "responsive" (i.e., emerging after sexual activity has already started; Basson, 2001). Psychoeducation often highlights this responsive desire – that sexual activity can trigger the desire for more – and thus promotes engaging in sex without strong initial interest (e.g., Gunst et al., 2019).

Previous studies suggest that individual motives for sexual compliance can be indicators of the consequences of sexual compliance. Adapting the idea of approach and avoidance motivational systems in sexuality (Impett et al., 2005), these motives can be divided into *approach* and a*voidance motives*. In committed relationships, approach motives focus on positive outcomes, such as enhanced intimacy in the relationship or a partner's sexual satisfaction. In contrast, avoidance motives include avoiding a negative outcome, such as a partner's loss of interest in the relationship or one's own guilt for not consenting to

the unwanted sexual activity. Approach motives for pursuing sex are generally associated with greater sexual satisfaction compared to avoidance motives (Muise et al., 2013). However, Katz and Tirone (2009) found that in their sample of U.S. undergraduate women, approach motives for sexual compliance had no consequences for relationship satisfaction, whereas avoidance motives predicted decreased relationship satisfaction.

The Current Study

The present study aimed to investigate sexual compliance in a demographically diverse Finnish sample. To our knowledge, this study was the first to investigate sexual compliance in the Nordic countries. Finland has long integrated comprehensive sex education into school programs (Apter, 2011), and scores, among the other Nordic countries, high on egalitarian gender-role attitudes (e.g., Kolpashnikova et al., 2020). In addition to providing an overview of the association between sexual compliance and different demographic aspects, we investigated the following questions:

Q1. Are components of the sexual self-control model (Kennett et al., 2009) associated with sexual compliance? Here, we hypothesized that women who report (a) poorer (vs. better) sexual resourcefulness skills, (b) lower (vs. higher) sexual self-efficacy, and (c) more (vs. less) motives for complying to unwanted sexual activity would report more sexual compliance.

Q2. Is partner sexual relationship power (Conroy et al., 2015) associated with sexual compliance? Here, we hypothesized that women who report higher (vs. lower) *partner* sexual relationship power would report more sexual compliance.

Q3. What are the experienced consequences of sexual compliance, and how do sexual self-control (including approach and avoidance motives) and partner sexual relationship power relate to these consequences? Here, we hypothesized that (a) women who report more (vs. less) approach motives for sexual compliance report more positive personal and relationship-related consequences. Moreover, women who report (b) more (vs. less) avoidance motives for sexual compliance, (c) poorer (vs. better) sexual resourcefulness skills, (d) lower (vs. higher) sexual self-efficacy, (d) higher (vs. lower) *partner* relationship control and (e) higher (vs. lower) *partner* decision-making dominance report less positive personal and relationship-related consequences.

We originally intended to investigate these questions across different gender groups, but we omitted these comparisons as the sample sizes for men and trans/non-binary individuals were small. However, we still present descriptive statistics for men and trans/non-binary individuals.

Method

Ethical Statement

The Board for Research Ethics at the Department of Psychology at Åbo Akademi University granted ethical permission for the current study before the data collection commenced. All participants gave informed consent per the Helsinki Declaration before participating in the study.

Procedure

We created the survey in Finnish through a secure online survey software. We recruited participants through an e-mail list of a local university, two large Finnish online forums (*Suomi24* and *vauva.fi*), shares on social media platforms (Facebook and Instagram), and a link featured in an online article on sexual compliance in a large national newspaper (*Helsingin Sanomat*). To attract more male participants, we also shared the study in a large Finnish Facebook group for men (*MiestenHuone*; Men's room). However, it is likely that most of the participants found the study through two social media influencers on Instagram who advertised the online survey to their followers (170,000 and 24,000), since we noted a peak in responses after these shares. When sharing the link to the study, the attached text stated that it was a survey study on sexual compliance and that more information about the study could be found through the link.

Before participating, participants were asked to read and approve an electronic informed consent form and confirm that they were at least 18 years old. The consent form included a description of the study's voluntary nature and the possibility of withdrawing from the study at any point without questions or consequences. The participants were told that they were participating in a study regarding their sexual experiences in their current or most recent partnership and possible experiences of sexual compliance. Individuals without experiences of sexual compliance were also welcome to participate in the study. Sexual compliance was defined as consenting to sexual activity (e.g., fondling or oral sex) despite a lack of sexual desire and in the absence of immediate partner pressure, manipulation, or coercion.

Measures

The survey included the following demographic information: age, occupation, highest education, monthly income, gender, sexual orientation, relationship status, and duration of their current or most recent intimate relationship. For the partner sexual relationship power scale, the participants were asked to base their answers on their current or most recent relationship, in case they were not in a relationship. We also asked the participants whether they had ever experienced unwanted sexual advances; ever consented to unwanted sexual activity despite not being pressured, manipulated, or coerced (from here on referred to as *lifetime sexual compliance*); experienced unwanted sexual advances in their current or most recent relationship, and consented to unwanted sexual activity in their current or most recent relationship. Only individuals who had experienced unwanted sexual advances and had complied to unwanted sexual activity in their current or most recent relationship answered the scales of sexual compliance (from here on referred to as *sexual compliance*), motives for sexual compliance, and experienced consequences of sexual compliance.

Sexual Resourcefulness

We used a 19-item self-report measure, the Sexual Resourcefulness Scale (Kennett et al., 2009) to assess participants' sexual resourcefulness (i.e., self-control strategies individuals use to handle unwanted sexual advances or activities). An example of the items is, *"I plan in advance how far I want to go with any sexual activity and am able to stop the activity before it goes too far."* Participants were instructed to evaluate their behavior generally, including situations outside of the current or most recent relationship, by rating 19 statements on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *very uncharacteristic of me*, 6 = *very characteristic of me*). The sum score ranged from 19 to 114, with higher scores reflecting more frequent use of sexual self-control strategies, that is, better sexual resourcefulness. Kennett et al. (2009) reported a mean score of 80.51 (*SD* = 18.86) and a Cronbach's α of .91 in their sample of undergraduate women. Quinn-Nilas et al. (2013) reported a mean score of 73.84 (*SD* = 17.02) and a Cronbach's α of .89 in their sample of undergraduate men. In the current study, Cronbach's α for the total sample was .84.

Sexual Self-Efficacy

We used a slightly modified 5-item version of the Sexual Self-Efficacy Scale (Heimonen, 2015; Kennett et al., 2009) to assess participants' sexual self-efficacy (i.e., belief in their ability to handle or prevent unwanted sexual advances). An example of the items is *"I believe I am in full control when unwanted sexual advances are made toward me."* Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all like me*, 5 = *very much like me*). The sum score ranged from 5 to 25, with higher scores reflecting participants' greater belief in being in control in sexual situations, that is, higher sexual self-efficacy. For the original 9-item scale, Kennett et al. (2009) reported an average score of 25.75 (*SD* = 7.71) with a Cronbach's α of .78 in their sample of undergraduate women. Quinn-Nilas et al. (2013) reported a mean score of 26.76 (*SD* = 8.32) and a Cronbach's α of .80 in their sample of undergraduate men. In the current study, Cronbach's α for the total sample was .79.

Partner Sexual Relationship Power

Similarly to Conroy et al. (2015), we used five items from two subscales in the Sexual Relationship Power Scale (Pulerwitz & Gortmaker, 2000) to assess partner sexual relationship power, a proxy measure for covert social coercion. The *partner relationship control* subscale consisted of five items (items 3, 6, 10, 11, and 13 from the original scale). An example of the items is *"I am more committed to the relationship than my partner is."* Responses were rated on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 4 = *strongly agree*). The *partner decision-making dominance* subscale consisted of five items (items 17–21 from the original scale) that were slightly modified from the original scale by Conroy et al. (2015). The original scale included eight questions with the response options partner, both of you, and you. In our study, the questions were phrased as statements, and the response options were true (2) or false (1). An example of the items is *"My partner has more say about what we do together."* The sum score ranged from 5 to 20 for the first subscale and from 5 to 10 for the second subscale, with higher scores on both scales indicating that the participant experienced having less authority than their partner in the sexual relationship, that is, higher *partner* sexual relationship power. In the current study, Cronbach's α for the total sample was .76 for partner relationship control and .70 for partner decision-making dominance.

Sexual Compliance

To assess sexual compliance, we used a slightly modified version of the 4-item Sexual Giving-in Experiences Scale (Conroy et al., 2015). Using a 4-point Likert scale, the items measure how often the participant generally complies to unwanted sexual activities in their relationship (1 = *never/0% of the time*, 4 = *every time/100% of the time*). The original scale included four sexual activities: genital stimulation by hand, oral sex, vaginal intercourse or other penetrative activity, and anal intercourse or other penetrative activity. In the present study, we added a fifth category: other sexual activity. As the Sexual Giving-in Experiences Scale was only presented to participants who reported that they had complied to sexual activity in their current/recent relationship, participants who had responded that they had experienced unwanted sexual advances in their current/recent relationship but that they had never complied to unwanted sexual activity in their current/recent relationship were coded as "1 = never/0% of the time" on each of the five items.

Motives for Sexual Compliance

To assess participants' motives for sexual compliance, we used the 18-item Reasons for Consenting to Unwanted Sexual Advances Inventory (Kennett et al., 2009; see Milhausen et al., 2019 for the items). To increase the number of items assessing approach motives, we added six items from the Sex Motives Measure (Cooper et al., 1998). We modified these six items to follow the phrasing of the Reasons for Consenting scale. Eight of the 24 items were considered to reflect approach motives (e.g., "*I wanted to feel closer to my partner*"), and eight items were considered to reflect avoidance motives (e.g., "*I didn't want to hurt my partner's feelings*"). The rest of the statements did not fall into either of these categories. Responses were rated on a 10-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all characteristic of me*; 10 = *very characteristic of me*), as suggested by Kennett et al. (2013). We created a sum score of all 24 items, ranging from 24 to 240, with higher scores reflecting more motives for sexual compliance. We also created separate sum scores for the eight approach and eight avoidance items. These sum scores ranged from 8 to 80, with higher scores reflecting more approach/avoidance motives for sexual compliance. In the current study, Cronbach's α for the full sample was .93 for the total scale, .89 for the approach motives, and .90 for the avoidance motives.

Experienced Consequences of Sexual Compliance

To assess the experienced personal and relationship-related consequences of sexual compliance, we used a 7-item self-constructed measure. Participants were asked to evaluate experienced consequences of sexual compliance regarding

the following aspects: mood, self-esteem, relationship satisfaction, intimacy in the relationship, trust in the relationship, feelings of love or attachment, and sexual satisfaction. Responses were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *affected very negatively*, 4 = *not affected*, 7 = *affected very positively*). That is, scores 1–3 reflected experiencing negative consequences, and scores 5–7 reflected experiencing positive consequences. Possible scores ranged from 7 to 49, with higher scores indicating experiencing more positive consequences. Cronbach's alpha for the total sample was .92. The scale had an optional exploratory item where the participant could define and rate an experienced consequence. This item was used to screen if there were any areas that the scale did not consider.

Participants

The inclusion criteria for the study were being at least 18 years old and having a current or recent (i.e., ended within 12 months) intimate relationship that had lasted for at least two months. In total, 1,638 participants started filling out the survey. However, only those who completed the sexual resourcefulness and the sexual self-efficacy measures (N = 1,496 respondents) were included in the full sample. A total of 918 respondents completed the survey (see detailed response rates in Table 1). Experiences of sexual compliance in the current or recent intimate relationship were required to answer the measures for sexual compliance (although values for those who never complied were later added, see Sexual Compliance section above), motives for sexual compliance, and consequences of sexual compliance. Consequently, the response rate dropped for these scales. Other changes in response rates were due to dropouts (n = 81; 5.4%). All valid data were included in the analyses.

Statistical Analyses

We analyzed the data with IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 27). As the sample sizes for men (n = 51) and other genders (n = 51) were small, we only calculated sexual compliance and initial bivariate correlations between study measures for these groups. As women constituted most of the sample, we included only women in the subsequent analyses. We determined normal distributions by observing Shapiro-Wilk test results.

For the demographic analyses, we first conducted bivariate correlations between demographic variables and study measures. We then investigated associations between relationship status and sexual compliance, as well as sexual orientation and sexual compliance, with one-way ANOVAs. The analysis for relationship status included only those participants who reported being currently/recently in a relationship. We used Tukey honestly significant difference post hoc tests to specify the significant differences.

To explore the hypotheses for Q1, Q2, and Q3, we first conducted bivariate correlations for the sum scores of the scales. We then performed standard multiple regressions in cases where the correlations were significant. Before conducting the standard multiple regressions, we observed variance inflation factor (< 4) and tolerance values (> 0.25) to ensure no multicollinearity. We visually reviewed histograms and P-P plots of residuals to make sure the normality of residuals assumption was supported. We excluded missing cases pairwise. For testing the hypotheses of Q1 and Q2, we conducted a standard multiple regression with sexual compliance as the dependent variable and the following independent variables: sexual resourcefulness, sexual self-efficacy, partner relationship control, and partner decision-making dominance. We also added significant variables from the demographical correlation analyses (age and education level) as covariates. As only those who had complied to sexual activity in their current/recent relationship filled out their motives for complying, this variable was analyzed in a separate multiple regression, together with the covariates. This was done to retain as much data as possible in the other regression. For testing the hypotheses of Q3, we performed a standard multiple regression with consequences of sexual compliance as a dependent variable and the following as independent variables: approach motives for sexual compliance, avoidance motives for sexual compliance, sexual resourcefulness, sexual self-efficacy, partner relationship control, and partner decision-making dominance.

Table 1. Response rates for each scale.

Scale	*n*	% (of *N*)
Sexual resourcefulness	1,496	100.0
Sexual self-efficacy	1,496	100.0
Partner relationship control	1,452	97.1
Partner decision-making dominance	1,452	97.1
Sexual compliance	954	63.8
Motives for sexual compliance	939	62.8
Consequences of sexual compliance	918	61.4

The difference between partner decision-making dominance and sexual compliance is mostly due to survey termination logic (i.e., requiring experiences of sexual compliance in the current or most recent relationship; n = 497; 33.2% terminated because they did not fulfill the criterion). The rest of the change in response rate between the first and last scale is due to dropouts (n = 81; 5.4%).

Results

Participant Demographics

Detailed participant demographics are presented in Table 2. The total sample consisted of 1,496 participants, of which the majority (93.2%) identified as women. Most of the women identified as either heterosexual (64.3%) or bisexual (24.5%). The participants' age ranged between 18 and 73 years (M = 26.0; SD = 6.7). Most participants (68.5%) reported being currently either in a committed relationship or a domestic partnership. Of those in a relationship at the time of the study, the mean duration of the relationship was 4.9 years (SD = 5.2). For those not currently in a relationship, the mean duration of their most recent relationship was 1.8 years (SD = 1.8).

Lifetime Compliance and Sexual Compliance in Current/Recent Relationship

Of the total sample, 1,386 participants (92.7%; women 94.0%, men 60.8%, other 88.2%) had complied to sexual activity at least once at some point in their life (i.e., lifetime compliance) and 958 participants (64.0%; women 64.9%, men 37.3%, other 66.7%) had complied to sexual activity in their current or most recent relationship. Table 3 shows the number of participants who gave each response for each sexual activity. For genital stimulation, oral sex,

Table 2. Participant demographics (N = 1,496).

Variable	*n*	%
Age		
18–25	937	57.3
26–33	531	32.5
34–41	114	7.0
42–51	36	2.2
52–73	17	1.1
Gender		
Women	1,394	93.2
Men	51	3.4
Other (e.g., non-binary, transgender, gender non-conforming)	51	3.4
Sexual orientation		
Heterosexual	945	63.2
Bisexual	356	23.8
Pansexual	106	7.1
Lesbian/gay	32	2.1
Other	37	2.5
Asexual	20	1.3
Relationship status		
Committed relationship	565	37.8
Domestic partnership	459	30.7
Married	204	13.6
Single	172	11.5
Casual relationship	61	4.1
non-monogamous relationship	33	2.2
Other	2	0.1
Occupation		
Student	649	43.4
Working	652	43.6
Unemployed	113	7.6
Other	63	4.2
Retired	19	1.3
Highest educational level		
Secondary school	755	50.5
Bachelor's degree	470	31.4
Master's degree	178	11.9
Comprehensive school	80	5.3
Institute degree	12	0.8
No education/other education	1	0.1
Monthly income (in euros)		
< 500	348	23.3
500–999	382	25.5
1,000–1,999	281	18.8
2,000–2,999	313	20.9
3,000–3,999	123	8.2
4,000–5,999	38	2.5
> 5,999	11	0.7

M_{age} = 26.0 (*SD* = 6.7). We added age ranges in this table for a more detailed overview of the age distribution.

vaginal intercourse or other penetrative activity, and other activity, the most common response option was 2 (25% of the time). For anal intercourse or other penetrative activity, the most common response option was 1 (0% of times). This was also true when only women were observed.

Sexual Compliance and Demographic Aspects

One-way ANOVA results for comparing women's sexual compliance based on sexual orientation and relationship type are presented in Table 4. A post hoc Tukey test showed that those currently in a casual relationship (*M* = 11.37) complied to sex more often compared to those married (*M* = 9.36), in a committed (*M* = 9.74), non-monogamous (*M* = 8.94), or domestic relationship (*M* = 9.84). There were no significant differences in sexual compliance between the different categories of sexual orientation.

Bivariate correlations between demographic variables and the study measures in women are presented in Table 5. Of the demographic variables, age (r = −.12) and level of education (r = −.08) were significantly associated with sexual compliance in women, indicating that older women with higher education reported less sexual compliance.

Correlations between Sexual Compliance and Study Variables

Bivariate correlations between the study measures and mean values for the study measures are presented in Table 6. Sexual resourcefulness (r = −.42), sexual self-efficacy (r = −.23), motives for sexual compliance (r = .44), partner relationship control (r = .40), and partner decision-making dominance (r = .36) were significantly associated with sexual compliance in women. That is, women with poorer sexual resourcefulness skills, lower sexual self-efficacy, more motives for sexual compliance, higher partner relationship control, and higher partner decision-making dominance reported more sexual compliance. Both more approach motives (r = .30) and more avoidance motives (r = .38) were associated with more compliance.

Multiple Regressions for Sexual Compliance

Multiple regression results are presented in Table 7. The shared contribution of the study variables and covariates in the first regression accounted for 24.7% of the variance in sexual compliance in women. Women who had poorer sexual resourcefulness skills (β = – .29), higher partner relationship control (β = .19), and higher partner decision-making dominance (β = .10) reported more sexual compliance. Sexual self-efficacy was not uniquely associated with sexual compliance. In the second regression, motives for sexual compliance and the covariates accounted for 20.1% of the variance in sexual compliance in women. Women with more motives for compliance (β = .43) reported significantly more sexual compliance. Of the covariates, age was significantly associated with sexual compliance in both regressions (β = – .10 and – .12), so that younger women reported more compliance. Education did not have a unique significant association with sexual compliance in either of the regressions. In summary, apart from sexual self-efficacy in the regression model, we found support for Q1 and Q2.

Consequences of Sexual Compliance

The number of women reporting negative, no, or positive consequences for the specific well-being and relationship aspects is presented in Table 8. Negative consequences of compliance were reported most frequently for mood, self-esteem, relationship satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction. Positive consequences were reported most frequently for intimacy in the relationship and feelings of love or attachment.

The overall likelihood of endorsing negative/positive/no consequences of compliance (i.e., when considering all consequences) is presented in Table 9. Women reported only

Table 3. Number of participants who gave each response for each sexual activity in the modified Sexual Giving-In Experiences Scale .

	0% of times (never)		25% of times (one time out of four)		50% of times (around every second time)		100% of times (every time)	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Genital stimulation	141	14.2	468	47.3	290	29.3	91	9.2
Women	132	14.1	445	47.7	275	29.5	81	8.7
Men	3	15.0	9	45.0	5	25.0	3	15.0
Other	6	16.2	14	37.8	10	27.0	7	18.9
Oral sex	302	30.5	389	39.3	211	21.3	88	8.9
Women	287	30.8	367	39.3	200	21.4	79	8.5
Men	7	35.0	8	40.0	3	15.0	2	10.0
Other	8	21.6	14	37.8	8	21.6	7	18.9
Vaginal intercourse/other penetrative activity	186	18.8	448	45.3	267	27.0	88	8.9
Women	170	18.2	426	45.7	257	27.6	79	8.5
Men	5	25.0	8	40.0	4	20.0	3	15.0
Other	11	29.7	14	37.8	6	16.2	6	16.2
Anal intercourse/other penetrative activity	820	82.9	99	10.0	36	3.6	34	3.4
Women	771	82.7	96	10.3	33	3.5	32	3.4
Men	16	80.0	2	10.0	0	0.0	2	10.0
Other	33	89.2	1	2.7	3	8.1	0	0.0
Other sexual activity	318	32.2	421	42.6	192	19.4	57	5.8
Women	302	32.4	400	43.0	179	19.2	50	5.4
Men	3	15.0	8	40.0	6	30.0	3	15.0
Other	13	35.1	13	35.1	7	18.9	4	10.8

Table 4. One-way ANOVA results for women's sexual compliance based on sexual orientation and relationship type.

Group	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*	η^2	η^2 95% CI
Sexual orientation	40.12	5	8.02	0.97	.434	.01	.00–.01
Relationship status	113.36	4	28.34	3.59	**.007**	.02	.00–.04

SS = Sum of squares; MS = Mean square. Results for relationship status included only those women who reported being currently/recently in a relationship (n = 817).

Table 5. Bivariate correlations between demographic variables and study measures in women.

				Relationship duration	
Measure	Age	Income	Education	Current[a]	Recent[b]
Sexual resourcefulness	.01	−.02	.02	**.06***	−.09
Sexual self-efficacy	**.07****	.04	.05	**.09*****	−.15
Partner relationship control	**−.07****	**−.07***	**−.13*****	−.03	**.17***
Partner decision-making dominance	−.03	−.05	**−.10*****	−.01	.13
Sexual compliance	**−.12*****	−.04	**−.08***	−.05	−.03
Motives for sexual compliance	−.04	−.00	**−.10****	−.04	−.14
Consequences of compliance	.06	**.08***	.00	.05	−.14

Higher scores represent better sexual resourcefulness, higher sexual self-efficacy, higher partner relationship control, higher partner decision-making dominance, more frequent sexual compliance, more motives for sexual compliance, and more perceived positive consequences of sexual compliance.

[a]participants currently in a committed relationship.

[b]participants who had recently been in a committed relationship.

*p < .05. **p < .01. *** p < .001.

negative consequences most often (40.6%), followed by both negative and positive consequences (35.3%) and only positive consequences (22.4%). Only 1.7% reported that they did not experience any consequences at all.

Bivariate correlations between the consequences of sexual compliance and the other study measures are presented in Table 6. More approach motives were significantly associated with more positive consequences (r = .19). Poorer sexual resourcefulness (r = .26), lower sexual self-efficacy (r = .26), more avoidance motives (r = −.25), higher partner relationship control (r = −.24), and higher partner decision-making dominance (r = −.23) were significantly associated with less positive consequences.

Multiple regression results are presented in Table 7. The complete model accounted for 22.9% of the variance of consequences of sexual compliance in women. More approach motives were significantly associated with more positive consequences (β = .44), supporting Q3 (a). Poorer sexual resourcefulness (β = .11), lower sexual self-efficacy (β = .13), more avoidance motives (β = −.37), and higher partner relationship control (β = −.10) were associated with less positive consequences, supporting Q3 (b-d). Partner decision-making dominance was not uniquely associated with consequences of sexual compliance (p = .186).

Open-Ended Item on Consequences of Sexual Compliance

Some more commonly reported negative consequences in the open-ended item that were not already covered by the self-constructed scale were decreased sexual desire/interest (15 responses), lost sense of boundaries (11 responses), worsened mental health (10 responses), decreased sense of safety (5 responses), communication issues (4 responses),

Table 6. Bivariate correlations between the study measures for all participants and for separate gender categories.

Variable	1. Sexual resourcefulness	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
2. Sexual self-efficacy	**.30*** **								
Women	**.29*** **								
Other	**.34***								
Men	**.40****								
3. Partner relationship control	**−.43*** **	**−.27*** **							
Women	**−.44*** **	**−.28*** **							
Other	**−.31***	−.14							
Men	**−.42****	**−.47****							
4. Partner decision-making dominance	**−.37*** **	**−.26*** **	**.69*** **						
Women	**−.38*** **	**−.26*** **	**.69*** **						
Other	**−.44****	**−.28***	**.70*** **						
Men	**−.36***	**−.30***	**.61*** **						
5. Sexual compliance	**−.42*** **	**−.22*** **	**.39*** **	**.34*** **					
Women	**−.42*** **	**−.23*** **	**.40*** **	**.36*** **					
Other	**−.52****	−.09	.08	.25					
Men	−.20	−.27	.36	.04					
6. Motives for sexual compliance	**−.54*** **	**−.30*** **	**.50*** **	**.43*** **	**.43*** **				
Women	**−.54*** **	**−.29*** **	**.51*** **	**.44*** **	**.44*** **				
Other	**−.52****	−.26	**.38***	.28	**.59*** **				
Men	**−.52***	−.41	**.64****	**.65****	−.09				
7. Approach motives	**−.35*** **	**−.13*** **	**.33*** **	**.28*** **	**.30*** **	**.83*** **			
Women	**−.36*** **	**−.13*** **	**.33*** **	**.28*** **	**.30*** **	**.83*** **			
Other	−.21	.03	.17	−.01	**.53****	**.73*** **			
Men	−.31	−.35	**.64****	**.60****	−.19	**.80*** **			
8. Avoidance motives	**−.55*** **	**−.30*** **	**.42*** **	**.39*** **	**.37*** **	**.91*** **	**.63*** **		
Women	**−.54*** **	**−.29*** **	**.43*** **	**.39*** **	**.38*** **	**.91*** **	**.63*** **		
Other	**−.55****	**−.35***	.33	.32	**.53****	**.91*** **	**.52****		
Men	**−.56***	−.46	**.56***	**.50***	−.07	**.91*** **	**.58****		
9. Consequences of compliance	**.27****	**.27*** **	**−.23*** **	**−.22*** **	**−.11****	**−.15*** **	**.10****	**−.26*** **	
Women	**.26*** **	**.26*** **	**−.24*** **	**−.23*** **	**−.13*** **	**−.15*** **	**.10****	**−.25*** **	
Other	**.48****	.34	−.16	−.16	.15	−.19	.17	−.30	
Men	.27	.20	.09	−.12	−.05	−.07	.42	−.27	
M (*SD*)	66.92 (15.06)	17.55 (3.08)	9.86 (3.29)	6.33 (1.47)	9.94 (2.92)	127.32 (43.36)	47.35 (18.35)	48.68 (18.31)	26.07 (8.21)
Women	66.80 (15.01)	17.53 (3.07)	9.79 (3.29)	6.29 (1.45)	9.92 (2.87)	127.18 (43.52)	47.25 (18.42)	48.66 (18.28)	25.98 (8.19)
Other	64.25 (16.58)	16.27 (4.21)	10.50 (3.64)	6.60 (1.34)	10.76 (3.31)	136.19 (40.38)	54.09 (17.12)	52.25 (19.43)	25.81 (8.90)
Men	72.67 (14.05)	19.08 (2.74)	11.08 (2.66)	7.02 (1.81)	10.50 (3.65)	119.05 (40.08)	41.00 (14.23)	43.32 (17.22)	30.47 (6.97)
n	1,496	1,496	1,452	1,452	988	939	939	939	918
Women	1,394	1,394	1,352	1,352	931	888	888	888	867
Other	51	51	50	50	37	32	32	32	32
Men	51	51	50	50	20	19	19	19	19

Higher scores represent better sexual resourcefulness, higher sexual self-efficacy, higher partner relationship control, higher partner decision making dominance, more frequent sexual compliance, more motives for sexual compliance, and more perceived positive consequences of sexual compliance.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

feeling covert pressure (4 responses), worsened body image (3 responses), questioning aspects of one's own identity (3 responses) Oxford, and a negative view of men in general (3 responses). Notably, four participants reported being retraumatized or having trauma flashbacks in instances of sexual compliance because of past negative experiences. On the other hand, some participants reported positive consequences, such as finding desire, joy, or enjoyment in the sexual activity even though they did not feel like it in the first place (7 responses), as well as the climate getting better at home and/or the partner feeling better (5 responses). The other responses also included aspects close to those already covered in the self-constructed scale, such as worsened self-esteem and guilt (29 responses), negative feelings in general (16 responses), negative feelings toward the partner (9 responses), worse sex and issues related to sexuality (9 responses), worse relationship (8 responses), better mood (3 responses), and a better relationship (3 responses).

Discussion

In the present study, we studied sexual compliance in a demographically diverse Finnish sample. Our first aim was to test if previous theories on sexual self-control (Kennett et al., 2009) and *partner* sexual relationship power (Conroy et al., 2015) and compliance could be extended to a Finnish setting. Our second aim was to explore possible adverse and beneficial consequences of sexual compliance to the individual and the relationship and the association between these consequences, sexual self-control, and partner sexual relationship power. As the sample sizes for men and individuals of other genders were small, we focused on sexual compliance in women in particular.

Sexual Compliance and Demographic Aspects

In our sample, more than 90% of the women had complied to sexual activity at least once in their life. Moreover, most of

Table 7. Multiple regression results.

Dependent variable	Independent variable	*F*	df	R^2	R^2_{adj}	*b*	95% CI *LL*	95% CI *UL*	β	*t*	*p*
Sexual compliance *(n = 931)*	Sexual resourcefulness	51.97***	6	.25	.25	−.06	−.07	−.05	−.29	−8.98	< .001
	Sexual self-efficacy					−.03	−.09	−.03	−.03	−1.01	.314
	Partner relationship control					.16	.09	.23	.19	4.50	< .001
	Partner decision-making dominance					.20	.05	.35	.10	2.60	.009
	Age					−.05	−.07	−.02	−.10	−2.98	.003
	Education					.06	−.09	.21	.03	0.84	.401
Sexual compliance (*n* = 887)	Motives for compliance	75.17***	3	.20	.20	.03	.02	.03	.43	14.35	< .001
	Age					−.05	−.08	−.02	−.12	−3.45	.001
	Education					.02	−.13	.17	.01	0.30	.768
Consequences of compliance (*n* = 867)	Sexual resourcefulness	43.86***	6	.23	.23	.06	.02	.11	.11	2.84	.004
	Sexual self-efficacy					.34	.16	.51	.13	3.80	< .001
	Partner relationship control					−.25	−.47	−.04	−.10	−2.31	.021
	Partner decision-making dominance					−.30	−.75	.15	−.06	−1.31	.191
	Approach motives					.19	.16	.23	.44	11.23	<.001
	Avoidance motives					−.17	−.20	−.13	−.37	−8.41	<.001

Higher scores represent more sexual compliance, more positive consequences of compliance, better sexual resourcefulness skills, higher sexual self-efficacy, more motives for compliance, higher *partner* relationship control, higher *partner* decision-making dominance, more avoidance reasons for sexual compliance, and more approach reasons for sexual compliance.
***$p < .001$.

Table 8. The number of women reporting negative, no, or positive consequences for the specific well-being and relationship aspects.

Aspect	Negative consequence		No consequence		Positive consequence		*M*
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	
Mood	550	63.4	178	18.9	173	17.7	3.3
Self-esteem	383	44.2	289	33.3	195	22.5	3.7
Relationship satisfaction	461	53.1	158	18.2	248	28.6	3.6
Intimacy	281	32.4	167	19.3	419	48.3	4.2
Trust	323	37.2	358	41.3	186	21.5	3.7
Love/attachment	260	30.0	278	32.1	329	37.9	4.1
Sexual satisfaction	491	56.6	119	13.7	257	29.6	3.4

n = 867, Negative consequence = participants who answered 1–3, No consequence = participants who answered 4, Positive consequence = participants who answered 5–7.

Table 9. The overall likelihood of endorsing negative, positive, no, or both negative and positive consequences of sexual compliance among women.

Group	*n*	%
Full sample	867	100.0
Only negative	352	40.6
Only positive	194	22.4
No	15	1.7
Both positive and negative	306	35.3
Women with other consequences	131	15.1
Only negative	63	48.1
Only positive	16	12.2
No	0	0.0
Both positive and negative	52	39.7
Women without other consequences	736	84.9
Only negative	289	39.3
Only positive	178	24.2
No	15	2.0
Both positive and negative	254	34.5

Women with other consequences = Those who responded yes to an item inquiring whether they experienced any other consequences than those already inquired about. Women without other consequences = Those who responded no to an item inquiring whether they experienced any other consequences than those asked about. Only negative = Those who responded 1–3 (negative consequence) at least once and did not respond 5–7 (positive consequence) at all on the items inquiring about consequences of compliance. Only positive = Those who responded 5–7 (positive consequence) at least once and did not respond 1–3 (negative consequence) at all on the items inquiring about consequences of compliance. No = Those who responded 4 (no consequence) on all items inquiring about consequences of compliance. Both positive and negative = Those who responded both 1–3 (negative consequence) and 5–7 (positive consequence) at least once on the items inquiring about consequences of compliance.

these participants had complied to unwanted sexual activity in their current or most recent committed relationship. These numbers are consistent with previous results (Quinn-Nilas & Kennett, 2018; Quinn-Nilas et al., 2013). The yes/no questions about sexual compliance throughout life and in a current or most recent relationship did not specify which sexual activities the respondents had complied to. Because of this, our results should be compared only with findings that have defined sexual activity broadly.

Contradicting previous literature (e.g., Quinn-Nilas & Kennett, 2018), older women reported less sexual compliance in the correlation analyses. This difference might be due to our sample's broader age range compared to previous research. Additionally, a higher education level was related to less sexual compliance in the correlation analyses. Of the demographic variables, only age had a unique significant association with sexual compliance in the subsequent multiple regressions. As such, it seems like the other variables in the model explained the association between education level and sexual compliance in the preliminary correlation analyses. Indeed, in the correlation analyses, education level was significantly associated with all other aspects except sexual resourcefulness; women with a higher education level reported higher sexual self-efficacy, less partner relationship control, partner decision-making dominance, and fewer motives for consenting. In conclusion, it is possible that sexual compliance is pronounced in specific socioeconomic groups and that this is explained by differing relationship power dynamics and tools for dealing with sexual compliance. For instance,

a higher education level generally refers to a wealthier socioeconomic status; this may indicate that those with more institutional education possess social capital that helps to deal with unwanted sexual advances. To our knowledge, we are the first to study the association between education level and sexual compliance.

The Role of Sexual Self-Control

The sexual self-control model by Kennett et al. (2009) was almost entirely supported in our study, as sexual resourcefulness and motives for sexual compliance significantly explained some of the variance of sexual compliance in women. In our sample, sexual self-efficacy was not uniquely associated with sexual compliance in the multiple regression. However, sexual self-efficacy was associated with sexual compliance in the preliminary correlation analyses, indicating that the other variables in the multiple regression explained the association between sexual self-efficacy and sexual compliance. Indeed, sexual self-efficacy was associated with all other study variables in the correlation analyses. As the data of our study were cross-sectional, these results do not assure causality – that is, having poor sexual resourcefulness skills, low sexual self-efficacy, or many motives for sexual compliance to unwanted sexual activity would lead to more sexual compliance. Nevertheless, these results align with some of the previous literature (Kennett et al., 2009, 2013).

The explanatory power of the full model was modest, and, as Quinn-Nilas and Kennett (2018) also noted, the relationship between a woman's ability to refuse an unwanted sexual advance and the decision to do so is probably more complex than the model assumes. For example, the extent of commitment in the relationship might be a significant element in the process of sexual decision-making. In the current study, those who reported being in a casual relationship reported more sexual compliance than those in more committed relationships. Although this finding somewhat opposes previous literature (e.g., Kennett et al., 2009, 2013; Quinn-Nilas & Kennett, 2018), it is possible that, regardless of one's sexual resourcefulness skills, casual relationships place individuals in a position where pleasing the partner (e.g., by complying to unwanted sexual activity) is believed to be essential for the relationship to continue. In contrast, marriage and other more committed forms of relationships might provide a setting where saying no to sex is not perceived as detrimental to the continuity of the relationship. Thus, skills of sexual resourcefulness become more valid. As this result opposes previous literature, more research is needed to make further conclusions.

The Role of Partner Sexual Relationship Power

Supporting our second hypothesis, we found that more partner sexual relationship power predicted more sexual compliance in women. As Conroy et al. (2015) noted, this result questions the assumption that consent is given in the absence of pressure in occasions of sexual compliance. Thus, the sociocultural context and its effects on gender socialization and power dynamics in intimate relationships should also be considered in future research.

An important note is that the concept of partner sexual relationship power and its association with sexual compliance refers to a coercive experience instead of a willing one, and thus, further conclusions should be made with caution. For example, Bay-Cheng (2019) remarked that consenting to unwanted sex, even in a socially coercive context, can manifest (young) women's sexual agency, as sexuality can be used to achieve important goals, such as physical safety. However, this is not to say that having agency removes struggling or suffering. In fact, in the present study, reporting higher partner sexual relationship power was associated with less positive consequences of sexual compliance in the correlation analyses.

Consequences of Sexual Compliance

The most reported positive consequences (increased intimacy in the relationship and feelings of love or attachment) and negative consequences (decreased mood, self-esteem, relationship satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction) in the current study were consistent with previous literature (Impett et al., 2010; Katz & Tirone, 2009; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010). The experienced consequences of sexual compliance varied considerably between individuals: Roughly two-fifths of the women reported only negative consequences of compliance, one-third reported both negative and positive consequences, and one-fifth reported only positive consequences. That is, it seems like sexual compliance can be a viable strategy for enhancing personal and relational well-being in a subgroup of women. However, a group twice as large as those only experiencing positive consequences experienced only negative consequences, suggesting that careful consideration is needed in instances of sexual compliance.

As expected, sexual self-control and partner sexual relationship power were associated with the investigated consequences of sexual compliance. Opposing previous literature that found no significant association (Katz & Tirone, 2009), more approach motives for sexual compliance were positively associated with positive consequences. In line with previous research (Katz & Tirone, 2009), more avoidance motives were negatively associated with positive consequences.

Apart from suggesting themes that the self-constructed measure for experienced consequences of sexual compliance did not cover, the last exploratory item revealed that some individuals experienced detrimental consequences of sexual compliance for mental health, such as being retraumatized or having trauma flashbacks. Together, these results indicate that sexual compliance might have significant consequences for the psychological well-being of some individuals. Thus, institutional sex education should aim to inform and educate individuals to become more aware of how sexual experiences can affect mental health and how mental health problems might affect sexual decision-making. However, it might be that more complex actions and changes on systemic, communal, and individual levels are required.

Study Limitations

Some limitations must be considered when interpreting the results of the present study. First, those who participated in the survey may have been more open to or interested in the study topic already mentioned in the study advertisements.

Additionally, the respondent rate peaked after two social media influencers shared the participant invitation through their Instagram accounts. Presumably, the followers of these influencers share some common qualities. Topics covered by the influencers include, for instance, their everyday life, mental health, sexuality-related topics and sexual norms, ethically conscious living, human rights issues, and feminism. Although we do not have data on the demographics of the followers of these influencers, our best guess is that a majority were younge adult women. Compared to the general population, participants in our sample might score higher on aspects such as sexual self-knowledge and lower on the endorsement of more traditional gendered relationship scripts. The latter could arguably be associated with, for instance, lower male relationship power. Interestingly, although our sample of men was small (n = 51), these men reported higher means on the partner relationship control (M = 11.1 vs. M = 9.8; p = .006) and partner decision-making dominance (M = 7.0 vs. M = 6.3, p < .001) scales, contradicting the feminist assumption that men hold more power in intimate relationships.

Worth noting is also that our sample included participants with diverse sexual orientations and educational backgrounds, and the age range of participants was broader compared to the samples in previous literature. Nevertheless, the sample was asymmetrical regarding all the demographic variables, particularly participant age, gender, education level, and sexual orientation. Our results cannot be used to infer population prevalence rates.

As most men responded to the survey after the invitation was shared in a Facebook group for men with 38,000 members, the men in this study might represent a group with some specific attributes. The final sample included only 51 male participants; thus, conclusions about sexual compliance in men have poor generalizability. It is unclear why so few men responded to the survey. While men generally partake less in health behavior survey studies (e.g., Ryan et al., 2019) compared to women, it could also be that sexual compliance is less prevalent and/or more stigmatized in men. This would contradict the results of Quinn-Nilas et al. (2013), who found that the incidence of lifetime sexual compliance was rather prevalent in their sample of Canadian undergraduate men.

While we found no significant differences in sexual compliance between the different categories of sexual orientation, it is worth noting that we did not have data on the gender of the partner. Consequently, we do not know how many of the women who identified as, for instance, bisexual or pansexual were currently in relationships with men, perhaps more closely representing the dynamics of heterosexual relationships. Partner gender is also relevant in the context of partner sexual relationship power, which is based on a gendered power framework. Although research on compliance outside of heterosexual relationships is scarce, our result aligns with Rubinsky (2020), who found that complying was common in non-normative relationships.

There are also some potential issues regarding the measure of sexual compliance developed by Conroy et al. (2015). First, in the informed consent and study advertisements, sexual compliance was defined as "consenting to sexual activity … despite a lack of sexual desire." However, in the measure, compliance was phrased as "unwanted sexual activities." It is unclear whether the participants interpreted unwanted sexual activities in the same way as a lack of sexual desire. This is a widespread problem in the research on compliance, as scholars have used sex without desire and unwanted sex interchangeably (e.g., Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010). To align the participants' and the researchers' definitions, future studies should aim to provide more exact definitions of sexual compliance and sexual desire. Second, the measure only had four response options (0%, 25%, 50%, and 100%), making the estimates somewhat inexact. The lack of sensitivity makes it difficult to, for instance, distinguish between never and rarely having complied to sex, as the respondent must choose between 0% and 25% of times. Moreover, the measure did not specify what "of times" meant, leaving room for interpretation. For instance, it could have been interpreted as times they had sex altogether or times the partner made unwanted sexual advances. Lastly, as some scholars have noted (Muehlenhard & Peterson, 2005), sexual compliance as a dichotomous "desired vs. undesired" variable does not consider ambivalence and different levels of desire.

Another limitation is that the measure of consequences of sexual compliance was self-constructed. Although the selected items were based on previous suggestions in the literature on sexual compliance, all possible or relevant consequences might not have been listed. Although preliminary results of qualitative data on the experienced consequences (Gunst et al., 2023) highlight some aspects that were not included (e.g., decreased sexual desire, the individual's own boundaries becoming unclear), the results also indicate that all aspects included in the current study are commonly experienced consequences. The preliminary results from the qualitative data also corroborate the results from our open-ended exploratory item, where both decreased sexual desire and lost sense of boundaries were reported.

It is also worth noting that we asked the respondents to report the consequences retrospectively, which might be difficult. As Impett et al. (2015) noted, experienced consequences of partnered sexual activity may change daily. Daily diary studies and qualitative research on the consequences of sexual compliance could provide a more nuanced view of the subject.

Future Research

Future research should consider the conceptualization of sexual compliance in more detail. For example, Kennett et al. (2009) noted that sexual encounters among heterosexuals often include verbal and non-verbal persuasion. If one of the partners experiences the sexual advance as unwanted, persuasion from the other likely creates pressure to comply with the activity. Additionally, the role of covert social coercion in sexual compliance, together with possible past experiences of sexual victimization or past pressuring behavior from the partner, should be considered. As Vannier and O'Sullivan (2010) noted, sexual compliance in the context of past pressuring experiences with the current partner might be distinct from sexual compliance in a relationship that does not have a history of pressuring. A question that deserves further

exploration is whether the absence of immediate partner pressure always equals the absence of pressure altogether.

Moreover, it is possible that two distinct phenomena exist within sexual compliance: 1) consenting to unwanted sexual activity and experiencing a continued lack of desire throughout the sexual activity, and 2) consenting to unwanted sexual activity but "getting in the mood" at some point during the activity. As the present study indicated that those with more approach motives for sexual compliance were inclined to experience fewer negative consequences, we carefully suggest that having approach motives for sexual compliance makes it more likely for an initially unwanted activity to become wanted. This view also aligns with Impett et al. (2019), who found that higher sexual communal motivation (i.e., estimating that the costs of sexual compliance are reasonable for the self) was associated with more satisfaction in a romantic relationship.

Future research could also explore what precisely is unwanted in instances of sexual compliance. If an individual has motives to comply to unwanted sex, is it possible that some aspect of the activity or its outcome is actually wanted?

Conclusions

Sexual compliance was common in our sample of Finnish individuals in committed relationships, with rates comparable to previous studies conducted in the U.S. and Canada. Corroborating previous studies, women's sexual compliance was associated with lower sexual self-control and higher partner sexual relationship power, with these aspects explaining roughly one-fourth and one-fifth of the variance in compliance. Women's sexual compliance was further associated with lower age and lower education, of which the latter could be explained by other study variables. Women experienced both negative and positive consequences of compliance for the individual and the relationship, with roughly two-fifths reporting only negative consequences and one-fifth reporting only positive ones. Indications of severe negative consequences for some participants suggest that the phenomenon deserves further attention in research and clinical contexts.

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Data Availability Statement

The data set is available at https://osf.io/a62n5/.

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