

**Associations Between Relationship Factors and the Frequency of and Perceived
Consequences of Sexual Compliance**

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Master's Thesis in Psychology
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**Samband mellan förhållandefaktorer och de upplevda konsekvenserna samt
frekvensen av sexuellt tillmötesgående**

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Subject: Psychology	
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Title: Associations Between Relationship Factors and the Frequency of and Perceived Consequences of Sexual Compliance	
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<p>Abstract:</p> <p>Sexual compliance, i.e., consensually engaging in sexual activity with a partner despite the lack (at least in the beginning) of sexual desire, is common in intimate relationships and associated with positive and negative consequences for individual well-being. Little is known about factors predicting how often people are sexually compliant and how potential consequences of sexual compliance are perceived. The present study investigated how relationship quality and duration were associated with the frequency and perceived consequences of sexual compliance in committed intimate relationships. A total of 181, primarily Finnish, participants aged between 18 and 63 completed an online survey assessing demographic information, sexual compliance frequency, perceived consequences of sexual compliance, relationship duration, and relationship quality. Possible associations were analyzed with multiple linear and logistic regression analyses. Results revealed that for women, longer relationships correlated with more compliance. Additionally, higher relationship quality was associated with a more positive perception of the consequences of sexual compliance for women. No significant associations were found for men, which could be explained by the lack of statistical power in the analyses with men. The findings highlight the importance of relational aspects in understanding sexual compliance and its consequences, at least for women. The results indicate that sexual compliance might have protective functions for the relationship's well-being in longer relationships, such as promoting intimacy. Future research should focus on achieving larger and more diverse samples to enhance statistical power and generalizability, as well as investigating potential gender differences in the interpretation of sexual compliance questions.</p>	
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**ÅBO AKADEMI – FAKULTETEN FÖR HUMANIORA, PSYKOLOGI OCH
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<p>Abstrakt:</p> <p>Sexuellt tillmötesgående, dvs. samtycke till sexuell aktivitet med en partner trots avsaknad (åtminstone i början) av sexuell lust är vanligt i intima relationer och förknippas med både positiva och negativa konsekvenser. Lite är känt om faktorer som förutsäger hur ofta människor är sexuellt tillmötesgående och hur konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående uppfattas. Denna studie undersökte hur förhållandekvalitet och -längd är associerade med frekvensen och de upplevda konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående i långvariga intima förhållanden. Totalt 181, främst finska, deltagare i åldern 18–63 fyllde i en webbenkät med demografiska frågor, frekvens av sexuellt tillmötesgående, upplevda konsekvenser av sexuell tillmötesgående, förhållandelängden och förhållandekvaliteten. Möjliga samband analyserades med linjära och logistiska regressionsanalyser. Resultaten visade att för kvinnor korrelerade längre förhållanden med mer tillmötesgående. Dessutom var högre förhållandekvalitet förknippad med en mer positiv uppfattning om konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående för kvinnor. Inga signifikanta samband hittades för män, vilket kunde förklaras av bristen på statistisk styrka i analyserna med män. Resultaten belyser vikten av förhållandeaspekter för att förstå sexuellt tillmötesgående och dess konsekvenser, åtminstone för kvinnor. Resultaten tyder på att sexuellt tillmötesgående kan ha skyddande funktioner för längre förhållande, såsom att främja intimitet. Framtida forskning bör fokusera på att uppnå större och mer varierade sampel för att förbättra den statistiska styrkan och generaliserbarheten, samt att undersöka potentiella könsskillnader i tolkningen av frågor om sexuellt tillmötesgående.</p>	
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Introduction

In committed intimate relationships, whether monogamous or not, many possible conflict areas must be navigated to sustain a good relationship for all parties. One potential area of conflict is sex, specifically, the discrepancy between the desire for sex between parties. The dominant model of sexual decision-making consists of two main elements: sexual want and sexual consent (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2007). Sexual want refers to an internal desire to engage in sexual activities (Darden et al., 2019), whereas sexual consent refers to the behavioral expression of voluntarily participating in sexual activities. The latter must involve verbal or nonverbal acts to indicate agreement to participate in sexual activities (Darden et al., 2019). Sexual compliance occurs when one party has no initial sexual desire but voluntarily (i.e., without coercion or pressure) agrees to participate in sexual activity (Impett & Peplau, 2003; Katz & Tirone, 2010; Morgan et al., 2006). Sexual compliance should not be confused with sexual coercion or assault as it involves consent, while sexual coercion and assault do not (Quinn-Nilas & Kennett, 2018).

Frequency of Sexual Compliance

Sexual compliance is common in long-term relationships, as research has shown sexual desire discrepancy to be a common experience for individuals in long-term committed relationships (Day et al., 2015), and sexual compliance is a common way of dealing with differing sexual desires. A study of U.S. college students in committed long-term relationships found that over a two-week period, 38% of participants had consented to unwanted sexual behavior (O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998). More recent research on young adults in committed heterosexual relationships found that 46% of participants reported having consented to a sexual activity they did not have an inherent desire for at least once during a three-week period (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010). In their systematic review of research concerning sexual compliance in heterosexual relationships, Impett and Peplau (2003) found that women in long-term relationships complied with sex more often than men. A more recent Finnish study noted that it was more common for women and other genders than men to comply with sex at least once in an intimate relationship lasting at least two months (Himanen & Gunst, 2022). Vannier and O'Sullivan (2010) contradicted these findings, as they could not find significant gender differences in their study.

Much research around sexual compliance has focused on heterosexual couples, although the phenomenon also exists in other types of relationships. Rubinsky (2020) examined understudied relationships (e.g., LGBTQ relationships, BDSM relationships, and

polyamorous relationships) and found that roughly 44% of participants had consented to unwanted sexual activities with their current partner. The compliance rates in studies focusing on long-term relationships differ drastically from a study with a sample of novel sexual partners. Willis et al. (2022) found that only 0.6% of participants reportedly agreed to unwanted sexual activities during their most recent sexual encounter with a novel partner. It is necessary to note that the referenced frequency studies of sexual compliance used convenience samples, which means that the results do not necessarily represent the population. Although there are methodological differences and differences in how sexual compliance is defined between studies, findings still point in the direction of sexual compliance being more common in long-term relationships compared to novel sexual relationships.

Considerable attention in sexual compliance research has been directed toward the underlying reasons for compliance. Research using structured diaries and interviews found that in committed long-term relationships, the most common reason for sexual compliance was endorsing implicit contracts about maintaining sexual contact, even when one party did not desire engagement in sexual activities (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010). A study using structured questionnaires (with no option for free-text answers) found that the most common reasons for sexual compliance in long-term relationships were the wish to satisfy a partner's needs, promote intimacy, and avoid tension in the relationship (O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998).

Consequences of Sexual Compliance

Not much is known about the consequences of sexual compliance on individual well-being. Sexual compliance has been associated with negative consequences such as increased cortisol levels, a physiological marker of stress (Hartmann & Crockett, 2016). By contrast, other studies have found sexual compliance to be associated with positive consequences such as enhanced sexual satisfaction (Day et al., 2015), maintaining harmony in the relationship, and avoiding a partner's negative reactions (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010). Furthermore, sexual compliance could also be beneficial especially for people with a more responsive sexual desire (i.e., growing sexual interest in response to sexual stimuli such as touching (Basson, 2001, Štulhofer et al., 2013).

Current literature highlights both the positive and negative consequences of sexual compliance. However, factors that predict the frequency and the perceived consequences of sexual compliance in the relationship are less known. Contextual factors, such as underlying motives behind sexual compliance, could be associated with how the consequences of sexual

compliance are perceived. Impett et al. (2005) found a positive association between sexual behavior motivated by approach motives (i.e., focusing on obtaining positive outcomes such as enhancing intimacy in the relationship) and positive affect and satisfaction with life. The opposite was found for avoidance motives (i.e., focusing on evading adverse outcomes such as avoiding a conflict), as they were negatively associated with positive affect but positively associated with negative affect. Because there is a broad range of positive and negative consequences of sexual compliance, it is vital to research what could predict these. The results could make it easier to identify factors that could be helpful when working with desire discrepancy. Therefore, it is essential to investigate what predicts the perceived consequences of sexual compliance.

How relationship factors affect sexual well-being is being researched increasingly, and research has shown these kinds of interpersonal factors, such as relationship duration and quality, to be central to how we experience our sexuality and how we feel in our sexual relationships (Gunst, 2019). For instance, McCabe and Goldhammer (2012) found that women who had been in their current relationships longer had lower sexual desire than women who had been in their relationships for a shorter time. Also, relationship quality is positively associated with women's daily sexual desire (Dewitte & Mayer, 2018). Considering these results, it is motivated to study how relationship factors are associated with sexual compliance, as compliance occurs only in interpersonal contexts.

Relationship Factors' Role in Sexual Compliance

One factor that could be relevant to the frequency of sexual compliance is relationship duration. It has been observed in numerous studies that sexual desire tends to decrease in longer relationships (e.g., Murray & Milhausen, 2012), and this decline of sexual desire could be associated with the frequency of sexual compliance, as decreased desire may increase the number of times when sexual activities are started without one party feeling an initial desire. The negative association between relationship duration and sexual desire could mean that people in longer relationships comply more with sexual activities than those in shorter relationships. Alternatively, the frequency of sexual intercourse tends to decrease the longer a relationship lasts (Grøntvedt et al., 2019; Schröder & Schmiedeberg, 2015; Stroepe et al., 2015), which could indicate that people in longer relationships only have sex when all parties desire it. Thus, compliance would be less frequent than in shorter relationships. The study of Himanen and Gunst (2022) hints at this possibility, as they found that women's frequency of sexual compliance decreased the longer a relationship lasted.

As relationship duration is negatively associated with sexual desire and the frequency of sexual intercourse, it could be that people who have been in a long relationship with the same person might feel that the relationship is not as intimate as it might have been before (Grøntvedt et al., 2019). Therefore, people in longer relationships might have learned to appreciate sexual compliance as a solution to stay intimate in the relationship, even though sex has become less frequent. Thus, relationship duration may shape the perception of individuals who have been in a long relationship with the same person so that they perceive the consequences of sexual compliance more positively than those who have been in a shorter relationship. However, a longer relationship could also be associated with a negative perception of the consequences of sexual compliance. A longer time complying with sexual activities could increase an individual's frustration with their partner and their differing levels of desire, as sexual desire discrepancy is associated with relationship conflicts (Willoughby et al., 2014). This hypothetical frustration might also color the perception of the consequences of sexual compliance as something negative.

Another factor that could be associated with the frequency of sexual compliance is relationship quality. Both longitudinal and cross-sectional research has shown sexual compliance to be positively associated with relationship quality if compliance is motivated by approach motives and negatively associated with relationship quality, if compliance is motivated by avoidance motives (Impett et al., 2005; Katz & Tirone, 2009). Therefore, people more satisfied with their relationships might have a higher frequency of sexual compliance than those less satisfied because they have realized that compliance increases relationship quality or because they are less opposed to compliance with sex. However, relationship quality predicts higher levels of sexual desire (Brezsnyak & Whisman, 2004; McNulty et al., 2016). Thus, people more satisfied with their relationships might have a lower frequency of sexual compliance and a higher frequency of desired sex.

Relationship quality could also impact how an individual perceives the consequences of sexual compliance as positive or negative. Relationship quality is associated with positive consequences for personal well-being; for instance, Roberson et al. (2018) found that elevated levels of relationship quality worked as a buffer against the negative impacts of depression. Relationship quality is also associated with sexual satisfaction (Byers, 2005; Fallis et al., 2016) and a more positive communication style (Yoo et al., 2014). Thus, being satisfied with the relationship could mean more positive communication about sexual compliance and more feelings of satisfaction with sexual compliance. In other words, people who feel more

satisfied with their relationships might have a more positive perception of the consequences of sexual compliance than those who are less satisfied.

Aims and Hypotheses

The present study examined whether the quality and duration of the relationship are related to people's perceptions of the personal consequences of sexual compliance (whether positive or negative) and the frequency of sexual compliance in a relationship. Based on these variables, four research questions were formed.

The first research question was whether relationship duration was associated with the frequency of sexual compliance. Two competing hypotheses formed the basis for the tested research question:

1. Longer relationships are associated with more frequent sexual compliance in relation to how often a person has sex. This hypothesis is supported by sexual desire usually decreasing in longer relationships.
2. Longer relationships are associated with less frequent sexual compliance in relation to how often a person has sex. This hypothesis is supported by the assumption that partners only have sex when all parties included have a desire for it.

The second research question was whether relationship duration is associated with the perception of the personal consequences of sexual compliance. Two competing hypotheses formed the basis for the tested research question:

1. Longer relationships are associated with a more positive perception of the personal consequences of sexual compliance. This hypothesis is supported by the positive consequences of sexual compliance, especially for longer relationships, such as increased intimacy.
2. Longer relationships are associated with a more negative perception of the personal consequences of sexual compliance. This hypothesis is supported by the assumption that sexual compliance increases frustration with desire discrepancy, especially in longer relationships.

The third research question was whether relationship quality is associated with the frequency of sexual compliance. Two competing hypotheses formed the basis for the tested research question:

1. Higher relationship satisfaction is associated with more sexual compliance in relation to how often a person has sex. This hypothesis is supported by the

potential positive experiences of sexual compliance or because people satisfied with their relationships are less opposed to complying with sex.

2. Higher relationship satisfaction is associated with less sexual compliance in relation to how often a person has sex. This hypothesis is supported by relationship satisfaction increasing sexual desire.

The fourth and final research question was whether higher relationship quality is associated with a more positive perception of the personal consequences of sexual compliance. I hypothesized that those more satisfied with their relationships perceive the consequences of sexual compliance more positively than those less satisfied.

Methods

Participants

The inclusion criteria for the present study specified that participants must be above 18 and have complied with sexual activities at least once in a committed and intimate relationship. There were no restrictions for participants based on gender or sexual orientation. By the end of data collection, the sample consisted of 469 participants, of which 208 had not completed the survey. Additionally, 21 participants were removed because they were likely Chinese bots. The alleged Chinese bots were identified by their use of Chinese in free-text answers, which in most cases did not make any sense for the subject (i.e., answers were not related to the topic). Additionally, the suspected bots sometimes answered diametrically opposite to questions with Likert scales about very similar topics. Finally, because this study was part of a more extensive data collection also targeting individuals not in relationships, 59 participants were removed from the sample because they were not in a relationship. Therefore, 181 respondents were included in the final sample.

Procedure

The survey was created with the online survey platform Survey Analytics. Data collection was initiated in May 2022 and ended in September 2022. Participants were recruited through Facebook advertisements targeting individuals over 18 years or older in Finland. Additionally, flyers were distributed on university campuses, and the survey was posted on university mailing lists. The survey was also shared on our research group's webpage at the host university's official website, our research group's Facebook page, and the researchers' personal social media (Facebook, Instagram, Reddit) profiles. The survey was posted on social media platforms multiple times to achieve a larger sample size. The survey

was also posted on social media groups specifically for gender minorities to increase the sample size of sexual minorities in the study.

At the beginning of the survey, participants were presented with information about the survey, such as definitions of relevant terms and informed consent, to which they had to agree to begin the survey. In addition to completing the survey, participants were given the opportunity to participate in a lottery for two 50€ gift cards to a Finnish online multi-brand clothing store, with two winners randomly selected from those who agreed to participate.

Ethical Approval

Before data collection was initiated, the study and its setup received approval from the Ethics Committee of the Departments of Psychology and Logopedics at Åbo Akademi University. Participants were informed of critical aspects of the study before participation and provided informed consent in accordance with the Helsinki Declaration. Participants were also informed of their right to terminate participation without reason and that already collected anonymized data cannot be deleted upon request. Participants were also informed that anonymized data would be openly shared. The research incurred no costs to participants, and no invasive procedures were performed.

Measures

At the beginning of the survey, participants were asked for demographic information in Finnish, Swedish, or English, such as age, gender, sexual orientation, highest education, occupation, monthly gross income, nationality, and relationship status. Additionally, participants answered a battery of measures (see below for description) available in Finnish, Swedish, or English; previously validated translations were used for the surveys in Finnish and Swedish. When no translations were available, people within the research group with Finnish or Swedish as their native language translated the questions from English into Finnish or Swedish. Finally, the research team reviewed the translations and discussed possible disagreements. Participants were asked to base their answers on their current relationship for the measures concerning relationship aspects. If participants had multiple partners, they were instructed to base their answers on their primary or longest relationship. Relationship duration was measured by the years and months the respondent had been in a relationship.

Questions About Sexual Compliance

Aside from the above measures, participants were also asked how much they complied with sexual activities. Participants were given the option to report their compliance frequency in relation to how often they have sex in total on a scale of 0 to 100% of the time. Perceived

consequences of sexual compliance were investigated with the question, “Has complying to sexual activities affected yourself personally (apart from any consequences it may have had on the relationship)?”. The answer options included “No,” “Yes, it has had only negative consequences,” “Yes, it has had only positive consequences,” and “Yes, it has had both positive and negative consequences.”

Perceived Relationship Quality Component

The Perceived Relationship Quality Components Inventory (PRQC; Fletcher et al., 2000) was used to measure relationship quality. The present study used a short-form version of PRQC in accordance with the recommendation of Fletcher et al. (2000). Participants were instructed to evaluate their relationship quality by answering six questions (such as “How satisfied are you with your relationship?”) on a 7-point Likert scale (1 “not at all” to 7 “extremely”). Hence, possible sum scores could range from 6 to 42, with lower scores demonstrating lower perceived relationship quality. In the present study, Cronbach’s alpha for the sum of the PRQC short-form answers was .87.

Statistical Analyses

The data were analyzed with IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 28). A sum score for relationship quality was created, and descriptive analyses were conducted for all included variables. Multiple linear and logistic regression analyses were conducted to explore the research questions. Before conducting the multiple linear regressions, it was observed that the variance inflation factors (VIF) were under 10 and that tolerance values were above 0.1 to ensure no multicollinearity. Women’s VIF was 1.00, and men’s was 1.15. The tolerance value for women was 1.00 and for men 0.87. Histograms and P-P plots of residuals were visually reviewed to ensure the assumption’s homoscedasticity was supported. Only people who identified as men or women were included when testing the research questions, because the sample consisted of so few participants identifying as something other than men or women. Also, testing of research questions was done separately for men and women, because previous research (Himanen & Gunst, 2022; Impett & Peplau, 2003) indicates a gender difference in the frequency of sexual compliance. To test if relationship duration (predictor) and relationship quality (predictor) were associated with the frequency of sexual compliance (outcome), multiple linear regression analyses were conducted. To test if relationship duration (predictor) and relationship quality (predictor) were associated with the perceived consequences of sexual compliance (outcome), multiple logistic regression analyses were conducted.

The four groups based on consequences of sexual compliance were merged before using the perceived consequences item in the multiple regression analyses. It was deemed necessary for the present study to separate those who had perceived *any* negative consequences of sexual compliance from those who had only perceived positive or no consequences. Therefore, people who had perceived only negative or positive and negative consequences of sexual compliance were combined, as both groups had perceived sexual compliance to be harmful at some point. Because respondents who had perceived only positive or no consequences of sexual compliance had had no negative perceptions of the consequences of sexual compliance, these two groups could be combined. The original four groups of different consequences (no, positive, negative, and positive and negative consequences) were thus transformed into two new groups (one with those who perceived either positive or no consequences of sexual compliance and one with those who perceived either negative or both positive and negative consequences) to conduct the multiple logistic regression analysis.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

See detailed participant demographics in Table 1. The data included 181 participants, of which the majority identified as women. Most participants identified as heterosexual, and participants' ages ranged between 18 and 63 years ($M = 27.7$; $SD = 7.8$). Most participants reported being in a committed relationship or cohabiting. Participants' relationship duration ranged from 1.0 to 30.7 years ($M = 6.0$; $SD = 5.1$), and the relationship quality score ranged from 18 to 42 ($M = 35.4$; $SD = 4.8$). Most participants reported taking part in sexual activities either once or twice a month, once a week, or three to four times a week. The average frequency of complying with sexual activities was 40.6% ($SD = 34.3\%$) of the total number of times participants had had sex, and most participants reported experiencing no consequences or both positive and negative consequences of compliance.

Table 1*Descriptive Statistics*

Baseline Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Women	133	73.5
Men	44	24.3
Non-binary	3	1.7
Transwomen	1	0.6
Sexual orientation		
Heterosexual	127	70.2
Bisexual	35	19.3
Pansexual	10	5.5
Lesbian/gay	7	3.9
Asexual	1	0.6
Other	1	0.6
Relationship status		
Committed relationship	65	35.9
Cohabiting	52	28.7
Married	34	18.8
Dating relationship	19	10.5
Non-monogamous relationship	11	6.1
Occupation		
Employed/self-employed	89	49.2
Student	84	46.4
Unemployed	4	2.2
Other	4	2.2
Education level		
Primary school	4	2.2
Secondary school	54	29.8
Bachelor's degree	74	40.9
Master's degree	43	23.8
Doctoral degree	6	3.3
Monthly gross income (in euros)		
< 500	44	24.3
500 – 999	36	19.9
1,000 – 1,999	20	11.0
2,000 – 2,999	35	19.3
3,000 – 3,999	23	12.7
4,000 – 4,999	12	6.6
5,000 – 5,999	1	0.6
> 6,000	10	5.5
Nationality		
Finnish	157	86.7
Other	24	13.3

Baseline Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
Frequency of sexual activity with current partner		
Less than once a month	15	8.3
Once or twice a month	41	22.7
Once a week	43	23.8
Twice a week	31	17.1
3 – 4 times a week	41	22.7
Once a day	7	3.9
More than once a day	3	1.7
Perceived consequences of sexual compliance		
No consequences	82	45.3
Negative consequences	14	7.7
Positive consequences	26	14.4
Both positive and negative consequences	59	32.6

Relationship Duration and Quality and Frequency of Sexual Compliance

Results from the multiple linear regression analyses can be viewed in Table 2. For women, the regression model for relationship duration and quality did not significantly explain the frequency of sexual compliance in the relationship ($F [2;130] = 2.70, p = .071$). The model explained 4% of women's variance in frequency of sexual compliance ($R^2 = .04$). Relationship duration was a significant predictor of women's frequency of sexual compliance, but relationship quality was not. Because women's relationship duration had a significant positive association with the frequency of sexual compliance, it means that, for women, relationship duration predicted an increase in the frequency of sexual compliance. Women's frequency of sexual compliance increased by 1.29 percentage points each year in a relationship.

For men in a relationship, the regression model for relationship duration and perceived relationship quality did not significantly explain the frequency of sexual compliance in the relationship ($F [2;41] = 1.06, p = .356$), indicating that neither relationship duration nor relationship quality is associated with the frequency of sexual compliance. The model explained 5% of men's variance in frequency of sexual compliance ($R^2 = .05$).

Table 2*Multiple Linear Regression Results for Variables Predicting Frequency of Sexual Compliance*

Gender	Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>p</i>	95% CI	
						<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
Women (<i>n</i> = 133)	Relationship	1.29	.56	0.20	.022	.19	2.39
	duration						
Men (<i>n</i> = 44)	Relationship	0.00	.57	0.00	.997	-1.13	1.13
	quality						
Men (<i>n</i> = 44)	Relationship	1.11	1.15	0.16	.337	-1.2	3.43
	duration						
Men (<i>n</i> = 44)	Relationship	-1.07	1.61	-0.11	.510	-4.32	2.18
	quality						

Note. *B* = unstandardized regression coefficient, *SE* = Standard Error, β = standardized regression coefficient, CI = confidence interval, *LL* = lower limit, *UL* = upper limit. R^2 for women = .04, and R^2 for men = .05.

Relationship Duration and Quality and Consequences of Sexual Compliance

Results from the multiple logistic regression analyses can be viewed in Table 3. How women perceived the consequences of sexual compliance was explained significantly by a model including relationship duration and quality as predictors ($\chi^2 [1] = 10.41, p = .005, Nagelkerke R^2 = .10$). Relationship duration did not significantly change the odds of experiencing either positive or negative consequences of sexual compliance for women. Relationship quality was a significant predictor of the perception of the consequences of sexual compliance. For every one-unit increase in relationship quality, the odds of a participant perceiving positive consequences of compliance increased by a factor of 1.12.

The model, including relationship duration and quality as predictors, did not significantly explain how men perceived the consequences of sexual compliance ($\chi^2 [1] = 2.87, p = .238, Nagelkerke R^2 = .10$). Neither relationship duration nor quality significantly changed the odds of perceiving any negative consequences of sexual compliance for men.

Table 3

Multiple Logistic Regression Results for Variables Predicting Perceived Consequences of Sexual Compliance

Gender	Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Wald</i> χ^2	<i>p</i>	<i>OR</i>	95% CI	
							<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>
Women (<i>n</i> = 133)	Relationship duration	-.03	.04	1.74	.390	.97	.90	1.04
	Relationship quality	-.11	.04	8.51	.004	.89	.83	.96
Men (<i>n</i> = 44)	Relationship duration	-.01	.07	1.03	.868	.99	.85	1.14
	Relationship quality	-.18	.11	2.58	.108	.83	.67	1.04

Note. The degree of freedom for Wald χ^2 is 1. *B* = unstandardized regression coefficient, *SE* = Standard Error, *OR* = Odds Ratio, CI = confidence interval, *LL* = lower limit, *UL* = upper limit.

Discussion

The present study aimed to examine if relationship quality and duration are associated with the perception of the personal consequences of sexual compliance and frequency of sexual compliance. A survey study with a convenience sample of mostly Finnish women and men was used to examine possible associations.

Descriptive Statistics

The sample of this study mainly consisted of women and heterosexual individuals aged 18–63 years. Relationship duration was varied, as it ranged from 1 to 31 years. The number of people whose gender identity was something other than cis was low, which led to the decision to exclude them from the analyses concerning the research questions, as power would have been insufficient to study gender minority groups separately. As for sexual orientation, the sample consisted of almost 30% of other sexual orientations than heterosexual, which is a much higher rate than in the general population (Callahan et al., n.d.). The unusually high rate of sexual minorities could be explained by the research team, in

addition to posting the study on general social media forums, also posting the study on social media forums specifically for LGBTQ people.

The average compliance frequency of all the sexual activities participants had in an ongoing relationship was 40.6% of the total number of times participants had had sex. The frequency in the present study is like previous research (e.g., O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998; Rubinsky, 2020; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010), although it is good to remember that sexual compliance is defined and measured differently across studies, for instance, if participants are asked to look back on their whole sexual history or just the past month, or if the need for the absence of coercion is mentioned in the definition of sexual compliance.

How the consequences of sexual compliance were perceived was split evenly across the alternatives of perceiving no, positive, negative, or both positive and negative consequences of sexual compliance. This variability in answers was expected, as past research has found the consequences of sexual compliance to vary considerably between positive and negative consequences (Hartmann & Crockett, 2016; Herbenick et al., 2014; Impett et al., 2005; Katz & Tirone, 2009; Muise & Impett, 2015; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010). Only a minority of the sample perceived the consequences of sexual compliance as only negative, but if the people who perceived the consequences to be both positive and negative were added to those who only perceived negative consequences, over 40% of the sample perceived, at least at some point, the consequences of sexual compliance negatively. Because of this, it is essential to try and understand situations that involve compliance, as situations involving sexual compliance can create distress for the people involved.

Frequency of Sexual Compliance and Relationship Duration

The first research question was whether relationship duration is associated with the frequency of sexual compliance. For women, support for hypothesis one was found, as a significant positive association was found, which means that the longer a relationship lasts, the higher the frequency of sexual compliance. The same was not found for men, as relationship duration did not significantly explain the frequency of sexual compliance. These results contradict previous research, as Himanen and Gunst (2022) found that women in longer relationships reported less frequent sexual compliance. This difference could be due to a large difference in sample size, as Himanen and Gunst (2022) had a much larger sample size of 1,496 participants compared to 181 participants in the present study. Larger sample sizes can lead to more stable results. Smaller samples are more susceptible to random fluctuations, leading to inconsistent or unreliable findings. Larger samples are more robust and less

influenced by outliers or extreme values. Therefore, it is possible that the contradicting results of the present study are due to chance and do not reflect actual differences between the studies.

The positive and significant association between the frequency of sexual compliance and relationship duration for women could be explained by sexual desire decreasing the longer a relationship lasts (Murray & Milhausen, 2012), as decreased sexual desire may create a greater need for compliance in the relationship. If desire levels start decreasing before the frequency of sexual activities decreases, the likelihood of being sexually compliant increases, as there are more opportunities to be sexually compliant. It could also be that sexual desire and the frequency of sexual activities decrease at the same rate but that desire levels decrease much more than the frequency of sexual activities. This similar rate of the decrease could be explained by sexual compliance being motivated by a desire to please a partner or maintain intimacy, causing a lesser decrease in sexual activity. However, more research is needed to better understand the relationship between the frequency of sexual compliance and relationship duration, as Himanen and Gunst (2022) found the opposite of the results of the present study.

The most likely explanation for the difference in significance levels for men and women was that because the sample consisted of a much larger number of women than men, the probability of finding a significant association for women was much higher than for men. To explore this possibility, post hoc power analyses for multiple linear regression analyses were done to determine the required number of men for a power level of 0.8. The power analysis was conducted with G*power. Cohen's f^2 , the effect size needed for the analyses, was calculated with the formula $f^2 = R^2 / 1 - R^2$, which resulted in Cohen's $f^2 = 0.05$. A significance level of 0.05 was used for the power analysis. The number of men in the sample used in the present study was 44, and the power analysis revealed that a sample of 191 men would have been needed to achieve a power level of 0.8.

As some research has found women to be more sexually compliant than men (Himanen & Gunst, 2022; Impett & Peplau, 2003), the difference in significance levels between men and women might also be explained by relationship duration having a more substantial effect on women's compliance frequency than on men's. Another possibility for the gender difference in significance could be that on a group level, men's sexual desire decreases more due to increased age, and women's sexual desire decreases more due to the habituation to the same partner (Dawson & Chivers, 2014). This difference in what affects the

declining desire means that men's decreased sexual desire is not as partner-dependent as it is for women. Therefore, a long relationship with the same person could affect women more than just aging for men.

An interesting question is if the gender differences might be explained by a difference in how men and women interpret the questions. An example of a difference in question interpretation could be that men over-report their sexual behavior or exaggerate their sexual experiences, while women may be more likely to under-report their sexual behavior or downplay their sexual experiences. This difference may be due to low sexual desire being more stigmatized for men than for women and because of differences in socialization and cultural expectations around sexual behavior for men and women (Endendijk et al., 2022). For sexual compliance, this could mean men exaggerating their levels of sexual desire, therefore under-reporting their frequency of sexual compliance.

Perception of Consequences of Sexual Compliance and Relationship Duration

The second research question was whether relationship duration was associated with how the consequences of sexual compliance were perceived. Relationship duration did not significantly predict how either men or women perceived the consequences of sexual compliance. Communication, emotional intimacy, and power dynamics may play a more significant role in shaping perceptions regarding sexual compliance. A healthy and communicative relationship is more likely to foster open discussions about sexual boundaries and mutual consent, regardless of how long the parties have been together. Conversely, an unhealthy relationship can lead to feelings of pressure and coercion, irrespective of the duration.

Frequency of Sexual Compliance and Relationship Quality

The third research question was whether there is an association between relationship quality and the frequency of sexual compliance. No significant association was found for either women or men. These results indicate that the frequency of sexual compliance seems equal between people regardless of how satisfied people were in their relationships. This suggestion is further supported by the fact that the sample's relationship quality was quite varied (scores ranged from 18 to 42). It is worth remembering that the small number of men in the present study is a likely reason for no significant results for men.

There are some clinical implications of the lack of an association between relationship quality and the frequency of sexual compliance. This result indicates that compliance is not only something people do in relationships where they are not satisfied but that sexual

compliance is a common way of dealing with, for instance, desire discrepancy, regardless of how satisfied people are with their relationships. The insignificant result also indicates that sexual compliance might not reduce relationship quality, although it does not increase relationship quality either. The finding that sexual compliance neither increases nor decreases relationship quality contradicts previous research stating that sexual compliance could increase relationship quality (Day et al., 2015).

Perception of Consequences of Sexual Compliance and Relationship Quality

The fourth research question was the only directional hypothesis and was whether relationship quality is associated with a more positive perception of the consequences of sexual compliance. The hypothesis was supported for women, as higher relationship quality significantly lowered the odds of perceiving any negative consequences of sexual compliance. The hypothesis was not supported for men, as no significant association was found between relationship quality and the perceived consequences of sexual compliance.

One reason for higher relationship quality increasing the odds for women to perceive the consequences of sexual compliance more positively could be that a good relationship works as a protective factor against low well-being (Braithwaite & Holt-Lunstad, 2017). These protective factors might manifest themselves as better communication and trust, which, in turn, would color the perceptions of the consequences of sexual compliance more positively.

Another explanation for higher relationship quality increasing the odds of perceiving the consequences of sexual compliance more positively could be sought from evolutionary psychology. Having sex involves higher risks for women than men, such as pregnancy and caring for offspring for a long time (Trivers, 1972). These risks might implicitly steer behavior and attitudes so that women who are very satisfied with their relationships think about the possible benefits sexual compliance could bring to the relationship, such as increased intimacy, and less about the drawbacks and possible risks with sex. In contrast, women unsatisfied with their relationships might think more about the risks of complying with sex and, therefore, perceive the consequences of compliance more negatively. Drawbacks in applying an evolutionary explanation to what affects how women perceive the consequences of sexual compliance are that some individuals in the negative consequences group also perceived consequences as positive sometimes and that not all individuals necessarily express this form of behavior even though it is grounded in evolutionary theory. It could be speculated that this evolutionary explanation only applies to those whose

relationship quality is either very high or very low and that those who fall in between are more likely to alternate between perceiving the consequences of sexual compliance positively or negatively. Nonetheless, investigating gender differences from an evolutionary perspective and the different risks sex might pose to men and women might help create a sounder theory concerning behavior around sexual compliance.

Strengths and Limitations

The present study is one of the few studies to examine how relationship duration and quality are associated with the perceived consequences and frequency of sexual compliance. However, there are some limitations of the study. Firstly, the sample was small and mainly consisted of women. This gender difference is consistent with survey response behavior, as many more women tend to respond to surveys (Smith 2008). It is difficult to say why this is the case, but it could be that surveys about sexual compliance are not perceived as relevant by men as by women if men do not comply as much as women. Another reason could be that sexual compliance is so stigmatized for men that it reduces response rates. The insignificant results for men are probably not robust because of the small number of men in the sample.

Secondly, based on the gender differences in frequencies of sexual compliance from previous research (Himanen & Gunst, 2022; Impett & Peplau, 2003), separate analyses were conducted for men and women. This separation of men and women into different groups made it difficult to compare genders because of potential differences in the gender-typical behavior of the groups.

Thirdly, survey studies are vulnerable to response bias, with participants possibly answering a question in a way they think is desirable by the researchers or according to societal norms. Also, although the concepts of the present study were clearly explained at the beginning of the survey, there is always a chance of misinterpretation, leading to inaccurate or inconsistent data. Furthermore, the participants might have had trouble assessing the consequences of sexual compliance retrospectively.

Fourthly, the data used in the present study were cross-sectional, which means it was impossible to conclude causality or the direction of the relationship between variables. Cross-sectional data only provide information about a single moment, leaving out information about changes or trends over time. For example, the present study found a significant association between relationship quality and a more positive perception of the personal consequences of sexual compliance. Based on this study, it is impossible to say whether relationship quality leads to a more positive perception of the personal consequences of sexual compliance or

whether the positive perception of the personal consequences of sexual compliance leads to higher relationship quality.

Fifthly, it is essential to remember that the present study focused on associations on a group level and that there are probably many differences on an individual level. This difficulty of applying group-level results to try and solve an individual problem means that the implications for any clinical work are limited and should be implemented carefully in client work. In other words, clinicians must consider a patient's individual characteristics and needs when implementing a specific treatment.

Sixthly, the variation in the definitions of sexual compliance, what acts one must comply with for them to count as sexual compliance, and the time span participants are asked to consider (e.g., lifetime compliance vs. past three weeks) varies significantly across studies. These variations, and the fact that participants in the present study had to have complied with sexual activities before participating in the survey, which has usually not been an inclusion criterion in previous research, as many studies have included people who have not been sexually compliant, made the comparison to previous research difficult. This lack of clarity in the terminology makes it uncertain if different studies exploring sexual compliance have measured the same phenomenon.

Future studies should focus on achieving a larger and more even sample between different demographics to increase statistical power and generalizability. Also, to further explore the gender difference in the frequency of sexual compliance, future research should use measurement invariance analyses to explore if there is a gender difference in how questions about sexual compliance are interpreted. Additionally, future research could do experience sampling studies so that participants could immediately after complying with sex report how they feel. A significant improvement in the sexual compliance research field would be to agree upon a universal definition of sexual compliance that researchers worldwide could use to compare research results better. The present study defined sexual compliance as "...consensually engaging in sexual activity with a partner despite the lack (at least in the beginning) of sexual desire [...]. Sexual compliance differs from sexual 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.". This definition considers all forms of sexual behavior one might comply with and explicitly states that sexual compliance excludes any form of coercion. This definition leaves less room

for interpretation and is a more exact definition of sexual compliance than definitions used in some previous research.

Conclusions

The present study investigated how relationship quality and duration are associated with the frequency and perceived consequences of sexual compliance. A significant association between relationship duration and an increase in the frequency of sexual compliance was found for women. The other significant association for women in this study was between relationship quality and perceived consequences of sexual compliance, as higher relationship quality predicted a more positive perception of the consequences of sexual compliance. No significant associations were found for men, probably due to the present study's lack of power. In sum, the results of the present study support the notion that relational aspects play a role in how women experience and act around sexual compliance. Additionally, sexual compliance seems to be a common way of dealing with desire discrepancy regardless of the quality of the relationship. By exploring and addressing relationship dynamics, people working with sexual desire discrepancies can help improve sexual quality and overall relationship functioning.

Summary in Swedish – Svensk sammanfattning

Samband mellan förhållandefaktorer och de upplevda konsekvenserna samt frekvensen av sexuellt tillmötesgående

Introduktion

Ett potentiellt konfliktområde i intima förhållanden är sex, närmare bestämt diskrepansen mellan önskan om mängden sex mellan parter, vilket forskning har visat att är en vanlig upplevelse för individer i långvariga intima förhållanden (Day et al., 2015). En lösning på detta problem kan vara sexuellt tillmötesgående. Sexuellt tillmötesgående uppstår när en part inte har någon initial sexuell lust men frivilligt det vill säga utan tvång eller press, samtycker till att delta i en sexuell aktivitet (Impett & Peplau, 2003; Katz & Tirone, 2010; Morgan et al., 2006). Sexuellt tillmötesgående ska inte blandas med sexuell tvång eller övergrepp, eftersom de inte inkluderar samtycke, medan sexuell tvång eller övergrepp gör det (Quinn-Nilas & Kennett, 2018). Sexuellt tillmötesgående är relativt vanligt i långvariga intima förhållanden. Enligt Vannier och O'Sullivan var 46 % av personer i ett långvarigt förhållande sexuellt tillmötesgående (2010). En vanlig orsak till sexuell tvång eller övergrepp i långvariga förhållanden är att upprätthålla implicita kontrakt om sexuell kontakt, även när en part inte för tillfället känner lust för sexuella aktiviteter (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010). Resultaten i studier om konsekvenserna av sexuell tvång eller övergrepp för de inblandades välmående är motstridiga. Sexuell tvång eller övergrepp har till exempel associerats med negativa konsekvenser som lägre förhållandekvalitet hos kvinnor (Katz & Tirone, 2009), medan annan forskning har visat att tillmötesgåendet har samband med ökad sexuell tillfredsställelse (Day et al., 2015).

Hur interpersonella faktorer påverkar sexuell välmående undersöks alltmer och forskning har visat att interpersonella faktorer, såsom förhållandelängd och kvalitet, är centrala för sexuell lust (Gunst, 2019). Det har observerats i ett flertal studier att sexuell lust tenderar att minska i längre förhållanden (t.ex. Murray & Milhausen, 2012), och denna nedgång av sexuell lust kan vara associerad med frekvensen av sexuell tvång eller övergrepp, eftersom minskad lust kan öka antalet tillfällen då sexuella aktiviteter påbörjas utan att en part känner lust. Detta negativa samband mellan förhållandelängd och sexuell lust kan innebära att personer i längre relationer är oftare sexuell tvång eller övergrepp än de som varit i ett kortare förhållande. Å andra sidan kan den minskade frekvensen av sexuella aktiviteter i längre förhållanden (Schröder & Schmiedeberg, 2015; Stroepe et al., 2015) innebära att personer i

längre förhållanden bara har sex när alla parter har lust för det. Tillmötesgående skulle då vara mindre vanligt än i kortare förhållanden.

Eftersom förhållandelängden är negativt förknippad med sexuell lust och frekvensen av sex, kan det innebära att personer i längre relationer har lärt sig att uppskatta sexuellt tillmötesgående som ett sätt att upprätthålla intimiteten i förhållandet, även om sex har blivit mindre frekvent. Således kan individer som har varit i ett långt förhållande med samma person uppfatta konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående mer positivt än de som har varit i ett kortare förhållande. Å andra sidan kan en längre tid av tillmötesgående öka frustrationen med en partner och hans avvikande lustnivåer, eftersom sexuell lustdiskrepans är förknippad med relationskonflikter (Willoughby et al., 2014). Denna eventuella frustration kan också färga uppfattningen om konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående som något negativt.

En annan interpersonell faktor som kan påverka frekvensen av sexuellt tillmötesgående är förhållandekvaliteten. Forskning har visat att sexuellt tillmötesgående är positivt förknippat med förhållandekvalitet om det sexuella tillmötesgåendet motiveras av närmandemotiv (Hartmann & Crockett, 2016; Katz & Tirone, 2009). Därför kan människor som är mer nöjda med sina förhållanden ha en högre tillmötesgåendefrekvens än de som är mindre nöjda, eftersom de har insett att tillmötesgåendet ökar förhållandekvaliteten. Dock är förhållandekvaliteten associerad med högre nivåer av sexuell lust (Brezsnyak & Whisman, 2004; McNulty et al., 2016), och därför kan människor som är mer nöjda med sina förhållanden ha en lägre frekvens av sexuellt tillmötesgående och en högre frekvens av önskat sex.

Förhållandekvaliteten kan också påverka huruvida man upplever konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående positivt eller negativt. Förhållandekvalitet är förknippad med positiva konsekvenser för både intra- och interpersonellt välmående; Roberson m.fl. (2018) fann att högre nivåer av förhållandekvalitet fungerade som en buffert mot negativa följder av depression och förhållandekonflikter. Förhållandekvalitet kan vara en viktig faktor för att forma en mer positiv uppfattning om konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående. Således kan personer som är nöjdare med sina förhållanden ha en mer positiv uppfattning om konsekvenserna av tillmötesgåendet än de som är mindre nöjda.

Denna studie undersökte om individers uppfattningar om konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående och frekvensen av sexuellt tillmötesgående i ett förhållande är associerade med förhållandekvalitet och förhållandelängd. Utifrån dessa variabler bildades fyra forskningsfrågor.

Den första forskningsfrågan var om förhållandelängden hade ett samband med frekvensen av sexuellt tillmötesgående. Två konkurrerande hypoteser formulerades:

1. Längre förhållanden är kopplade till mer sexuellt tillmötesgående på grund av minskad sexuell lust.
2. Längre förhållanden är kopplade till mindre sexuellt tillmötesgående eftersom man har sex endast när alla inblandade parter har en önskan om det.

Den andra forskningsfrågan var om förhållandelängden var kopplad till uppfattningen om konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående. Två konkurrerande hypoteser formulerades:

1. Längre förhållanden är kopplade till en mer positiv uppfattning om konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående på grund av positiva konsekvenser såsom ökad intimitet.
2. Längre förhållanden är kopplade till en mer negativ uppfattning om sexuellt tillmötesgående på grund av ökad frustration med sexuell lustdiskrepans.

Den tredje forskningsfrågan var om förhållandekvalitet var kopplad till frekvensen av sexuellt tillmötesgående. Två konkurrerande hypoteser formulerades:

1. Hög förhållandekvalitet är kopplad till mer sexuellt tillmötesgående på grund av positiva upplevelser av sexuellt tillmötesgående.
2. Hög förhållandekvalitet är kopplad till mindre sexuellt tillmötesgående på grund av att förhållandekvalitet ökar sexuell lust.

Den fjärde och sista forskningsfrågan var om högre förhållandekvalitet är kopplad till en mer positiv uppfattning om de personliga konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående. Jag hypotiserade att de som är mer nöjda med sina förhållanden har en mer positiv uppfattning om konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående än de som är mindre nöjda.

Metod

Studiens inklusionskriterier innefattade att deltagarna var över 18 år och hade varit sexuellt tillmötesgående minst en gång i ett långvarigt och intimt förhållande. Totalt ingick 469 deltagare i urvalet vid slutet av datainsamlingen, varav 208 föll bort eftersom de inte slutfört hela enkäten. Dessutom togs 21 deltagare bort eftersom de misstänktes vara kinesiska bottar. Dessa bottar identifierades genom att de använde kinesiska i sina svar och eftersom de svarat diametralt motsatt på olika frågor om samma sak. Ytterligare 59 deltagare togs bort eftersom de inte var i ett förhållande. Det slutliga urvalet bestod av 181 respondenter.

Enkäten skapades med Survey Analytics-webbsidan. Datainsamlingen pågick från maj 2022 till september 2022. Deltagare rekryterades genom Facebook-annonser som riktade sig

till personer över 18 år i Finland. Flygblad delades också ut på universitetsområden och undersökningen delades via universitetets e-postlistor. Den delades även på forskargruppens webbsidor på värduniversitetets officiella webbplats, forskargruppens Facebook-sida och personliga profiler på sociala medier. Undersökningen delades på sociala medier vid flera tillfällen för att få ett större urval.

Deltagarna fick i början av undersökningen information om studien, inklusive definitioner av relevanta termer och de fick ge informerats samtycke som de behövde för att kunna delta. De informerades också om att deltagandet var frivilligt, om datasekretess och policyer för öppen åtkomst till data samt möjligheten att avbryta undersökningen när som helst. Förutom att fylla i enkäten erbjöds deltagarna möjlighet att delta i ett lotteri för att vinna presentkort till en finsk onlineklädbutik.

Innan datainsamlingen påbörjades fick studien och dess upplägg godkännande från den etiska nämnden vid institutionen för psykologi och logopedi vid Åbo Akademi. Deltagarna informerades om de kritiska aspekterna av studien innan de deltog och gav sitt informerats samtycke enligt Helsingforsdeklarationen. Deltagarna informerades också om sin rätt att avbryta deltagandet utan anledning och att redan insamlade anonymiserade data inte kunde raderas på begäran. Deltagarna informerades även om att det anonymiserade datat skulle delas öppet. Deltagandet orsakade inga kostnader och inga invasiva ingrepp genomfördes.

Vid början av undersökningen svarade deltagarna antingen på finska, svenska eller engelska på demografiska frågor som till exempel ålder, kön och sexuell läggning. De svarade även på ett frågebatteri om det aktuella ämnet. Den finska och svenska versionen bestod av tidigare validerade översättningar. Om det inte fanns tillgängliga översättningar, översatte forskargruppens medlemmar engelskspråkiga frågor till finska eller svenska. Deltagarna blev ombedda att svara enligt deras nuvarande förhållande, och om de var i ett polyamoröst förhållande fick de instruktioner om att svara utifrån sitt primära eller längsta förhållande. Förhållandets längd mättes i år och månader.

Utöver de tidigare nämnda frågorna blev deltagarna också tillfrågade om hur många gånger de hade varit sexuellt tillmötesgående och vilka konsekvenser det hade haft för dem. Deltagarna rapporterade sin tillmötesgåendefrekvens på en skala från 0 till 100 % av alla sexuella aktiviteter de varit med om i sitt nuvarande förhållande. Svarsalternativen för möjliga konsekvenser av sexuellt tillmötesgående inkluderade ”Nej”, ”Ja, det har haft endast negativa

konsekvenser”, ”Ja, det har haft endast positiva konsekvenser” och ”Ja, det har haft både positiva och negativa konsekvenser.”

För att mäta förhållandekvalitet användes en förkortad version av The Perceived Relationship Quality Components Inventory (PRQC; Fletcher et al., 2000), enligt rekommendation från Fletcher et al. (2000). Deltagarna fick svara på sex frågor på en 7-gradig skala för att utvärdera sin förhållandekvalitet, där 1 representerade ”inte alls” och 7 ”extremt mycket”. Summan av poängen varierade mellan 6 och 42, där lägre poäng indikerade lägre förhållandekvalitet. I denna studie var Cronbachs alfa för summan av PRQC-svaren 0,87.

Data analyserades med hjälp av IBM SPSS Statistics (version 28). En summavariabel för förhållandekvalitet skapades, och deskriptiva analyser utfördes för alla inkluderade variabler. Två multipla linjära regressioner och två multipla logistiska regressioner genomfördes för att analysera forskningsfrågorna. Endast personer som identifierades som män eller kvinnor inkluderades i analyserna av forskningsfrågorna på grund av det begränsade antalet deltagare av andra kön. Analyserna av forskningsfrågorna genomfördes separat för män och kvinnor eftersom tidigare forskning indikerar att det finns könsskillnader i frekvensen av sexuellt tillmötesgående. De fyra olika grupperna av konsekvenser av sexuellt tillmötesgående ändrades till två större grupper innan variabeln upplevda konsekvenser användes i multipla logistiska regressionsanalyser. Denna ändring gjordes eftersom fokus låg på dem för vilka sexuellt tillmötesgående kan vara skadligt. Till följd av detta fokus, och eftersom båda grupperna hade uppfattat sexuellt tillmötesgående negativt vid något skede, kombinerades personer som hade upplevt både negativa och positiva konsekvenser med personer som upplevt endast negativa konsekvenser av sexuellt tillmötesgående. Eftersom de deltagare som hade uppfattat positiva eller inga konsekvenser av sexuellt tillmötesgående inte hade haft några negativa uppfattningar om konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående, kombinerades dessa två grupper. De ursprungliga fyra grupperna av olika konsekvenser omvandlades således till två nya grupper, positiva och negativa konsekvenser, för att genomföra de multipla logistiska regressionsanalyserna.

Resultat

Se detaljerade demografiska uppgifter om deltagarna i tabell 1. Samplet bestod av 181 deltagare, varav majoriteten var kvinnor. De flesta deltagarna identifierade sig som heterosexuella och deltagarnas ålder varierade mellan 18 och 63 år ($M = 27,7$; $SD = 7,8$). De flesta deltagarna rapporterade att de befann sig i ett fast förhållande eller var samboende.

Deltagarnas tid i ett förhållande varierade mellan 1,0 och 30,7 år ($M = 6,0$; $SD = 5,1$), och förhållandekvaliteten varierade mellan 18 och 42 poäng ($M = 35,4$; $SD = 4,8$). De flesta rapporterade att de deltog i sexuella aktiviteter antingen en eller två gånger i månaden, en gång i veckan eller tre till fyra gånger i veckan. Den genomsnittliga frekvensen av sexuellt tillmötesgående var 40,6 % ($SD = 34,3$ %), och de flesta deltagarna rapporterade att de inte upplevde några konsekvenser eller både positiva och negativa konsekvenser av tillmötesgåendet.

Resultaten från de multipla linjära regressionsanalyserna kan ses i tabell 2. För kvinnor i ett förhållande förklarade regressionsmodellen med förhållandelängd och förhållandekvalitet inte signifikant frekvensen av sexuellt tillmötesgående i förhållandet ($F [2;130] = 2,70$, $p = 0,071$). Modellen förklarade 4 % av kvinnornas varians i frekvensen av sexuellt tillmötesgående ($R^2 = 0,04$). Förhållandelängden var en signifikant prediktor för kvinnornas frekvens av sexuellt tillmötesgående, medan förhållandekvaliteten inte var det. Eftersom kvinnors förhållandelängd hade ett signifikant positivt samband med frekvensen av sexuellt tillmötesgående, betyder det att kvinnors frekvens av sexuellt tillmötesgående ökade med 1,29 procentenheter för varje år i ett förhållande.

För män i ett förhållande förklarade regressionsmodellen för förhållandelängd och förhållandekvalitet inte signifikant frekvensen av sexuellt tillmötesgående i förhållandet ($F [2;41] = 1,06$, $p = 0,356$), vilket tyder på att varken förhållandelängd eller förhållandekvalitet har något samband med frekvensen av sexuellt tillmötesgående. Modellen förklarade 5 % av männens varians i frekvensen av sexuellt tillmötesgående ($R^2 = 0,05$).

Resultaten från de multipla logistiska regressionsanalyserna kan ses i tabell 3. Hur kvinnor uppfattade konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående förklarades signifikant av en modell som inkluderade förhållandelängden och förhållandekvaliteten som prediktorer ($\chi^2 [1] = 10,41$, $p = .005$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0,10$). Förhållandelängden förändrade inte signifikant oddsen för att uppleva vare sig positiva eller negativa konsekvenser av sexuellt tillmötesgående för kvinnor. Förhållandekvaliteten däremot var en signifikant prediktor för upplevelsen av konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående. För varje enskild enhet förhållandekvaliteten ökade, ökade oddsen för att en deltagare skulle uppfatta positiva konsekvenser av tillmötesgåendet med en faktor av 1,12.

Modellen, med förhållandelängd och förhållandekvalitet som prediktorer, förklarade inte signifikant hur män uppfattade konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående ($\chi^2 [1] = 2,87$, $p = 0,238$, Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0,10$). Som enskilda prediktorer ändrade varken

förhållandelängden eller förhållandekvaliteten signifikant odds för att uppfatta negativa konsekvenser av sexuellt tillmötesgående för män.

Diskussion

I denna studie undersöktes sambandet mellan förhållandekvalitet, förhållandelängd och uppfattningen om konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående samt frekvensen av sexuellt tillmötesgående. I studien användes en enkätundersökning med ett sampel som främst bestod av finska män och kvinnor. Samplet bestod huvudsakligen av kvinnor och heterosexuella individer i åldern 18–63 år och hade mycket variation inom förhållandelängden, från 1 till 31 år. Samplet bestod av en ovanligt stor mängd sexuella minoriteter jämfört med den allmänna befolkningen (Callahan m.fl., u.å.), vilket kan bero på att enkäten delades på forum i sociala medier specifikt för sexuella minoriteter.

Den genomsnittliga tillmötesgåendefrekvensen för alla sexuella aktiviteter i pågående relationer var 40,6 %. Detta resultat överensstämde med tidigare forskning (O'Sullivan & Allgeier, 1998; Rubinsky, 2020; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2010), även om det är bra att komma ihåg att sexuellt tillmötesgående definieras och mäts på olika sätt i olika studier, till exempel finns det skillnader i om deltagarna ombeds att se tillbaka på hela sin sexuella historia eller bara den senaste månaden, eller om avsaknaden av tvång nämns i definitionen av sexuellt tillmötesgående.

Deltagarnas uppfattning om konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående varierade, och både positiva och negativa konsekvenser rapporterades. En minoritet av urvalet uppfattade konsekvenserna som endast negativa, men när man beaktar dem som uppfattade både positiva och negativa konsekvenser hade över 40 % av urvalet någon gång uppfattat konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående negativt.

Förhållandelängden visade sig vara signifikant positivt associerad med frekvensen av sexuellt tillmötesgående för kvinnor men inte för män. Det positiva och signifikanta sambandet mellan tillmötesgåendefrekvens och förhållandelängd för kvinnor kan förklaras av att sexuell lust minskar ju längre ett förhållande varar (Murray & Milhausen, 2012). Denna minskade sexuella lust kan skapa ett större behov av tillmötesgående i förhållandet. Könsskillnaden i signifikansnivå kan bero på att minskningen av sexuell lust för män beror mer på åldern, medan kvinnors sexuella lust minskar mer på grund av tillvänjning till samma partner (Dawson & Chivers, 2014). Denna skillnad i vad som påverkar den minskande lusten innebär att mäns minskade sexuella lust inte är lika partnerberoende som kvinnors. Därför kan en lång relation med samma person påverka kvinnor betydligt mer än bara åldrande för män.

Könsskillnaden i signifikansnivå kan också bero på skillnader i hur män och kvinnor tolkar frågorna. Män kan överrapportera sexuellt beteende på grund av samhällsnormer och stigmatisering av låg sexuell lust, medan kvinnor kan underrapportera tillmötesgående på grund av socialisering och kulturella förväntningar (Endendijk m.fl., 2022).

Förhållandelängden förutsade inte signifikant hur deltagarna uppfattade konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående för vare sig män eller kvinnor. Det är troligt att andra faktorer, såsom kommunikationsstil, spelar en mycket större roll i formandet av uppfattningarna om konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående. Förhållanden med en mer positiv kommunikationsstil har visat sig ha högre förhållandekvalitet (Yoo et al., 2014). Därför kan det vara relevant för framtida forskning att närmare undersöka förhållandet mellan kommunikation och de upplevda konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående.

Det fanns inget signifikant samband mellan förhållandekvalitet och frekvensen av sexuellt tillmötesgående för vare sig män eller kvinnor. Detta tyder på att sexuellt tillmötesgående är vanligt förekommande oavsett nivån av förhållandekvalitet. Det icke-signifikanta resultatet tyder också på att sexuellt tillmötesgående inte verkar minska förhållandekvaliteten. Resultatet att sexuellt tillmötesgående varken ökar eller minskar förhållandekvalitet strider mot tidigare forskning enligt vilken sexuellt tillmötesgående kan öka förhållandekvaliteten (Day et al., 2015).

En högre förhållandekvalitet hade ett signifikant positivt samband med uppfattningen om konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående för kvinnor men inte för män. En anledning till att högre förhållandekvalitet ökade oddsen för att kvinnor ska uppfatta konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående mer positivt kan vara att en bra relation fungerar som en skyddsfaktor mot många saker, inklusive psykisk hälsa (Braithwaite & Holt-Lunstad, 2017). Dessa skyddsfaktorer kan yttra sig i form av bättre kommunikation och förtroende, vilket i sin tur skulle färga uppfattningen av konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående mer positivt.

Styrkor och begränsningar i studien

Den föreliggande studien är den första som undersöker hur förhållandelängden och förhållandekvaliteten är förknippade med de upplevda konsekvenserna och frekvensen av sexuellt tillmötesgående. Det finns dock vissa begränsningar i studien. För det första var urvalet litet och bestod huvudsakligen av kvinnor. Denna könsskillnad överensstämmer med svarsbeteendet i enkätundersökningar, eftersom fler kvinnor tenderar att svara på enkäter (Smith 2008). Det är svårt att säga varför det är så, men man skulle kunna spekulera att undersökningar om sexuellt tillmötesgående inte är lika relevanta för män som de är för

kvinnor om män inte är lika tillmötesgående som kvinnor. De icke-signifikanta resultaten för män är troligen inte robusta på grund av det låga antalet män i samplet.

För det andra, baserat på könsskillnaderna i frekvenser av sexuellt tillmötesgående från tidigare forskning (Himanen & Gunst, 2022; Impett & Peplau, 2003), genomfördes separata analyser för män och kvinnor. Denna uppdelning av män och kvinnor i olika grupper gjorde det svårt att jämföra könen på grund av ojämlika urvalsstorlekar och potentiella skillnader i könsspecifika karaktärsdrag på grupp nivå.

För det tredje är enkätstudier sårbara för svarsbias, där deltagarna eventuellt svarar på en fråga på ett sätt som de tror är önskvärdt av forskarna eller i enlighet med samhällets normer. Dessutom finns det alltid en risk för feltolkning av frågorna, vilket kan leda till felaktigt eller inkonsekvent data.

För det fjärde var data som användes i denna studie tvärsnittsdata, vilket innebär att det var omöjligt att dra slutsatser om kausalitet eller riktningen på förhållandet mellan variabler. Tvärsnittsdata ger bara information om ett enda tillfälle och utelämnar information om förändringar eller trender över tid. Till exempel fann denna studie ett signifikant samband mellan relationskvalitet och en mer positiv uppfattning om de personliga konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående. Baserat på denna studie är det omöjligt att säga om förhållandekvalitet leder till en mer positiv uppfattning om de personliga konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående eller om den positiva uppfattningen om de personliga konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående leder till högre förhållandekvalitet.

För det femte är det viktigt att komma ihåg att denna studie fokuserade på samband på grupp nivå och att det förmodligen finns många skillnader på individ nivå. Denna svårighet att tillämpa resultat på grupp nivå för att försöka lösa ett individuellt problem innebär att konsekvenserna för allt kliniskt arbete är begränsade och bör implementeras noggrant i klientarbetet.

För det sjätte varierar till exempel definitionerna av sexuellt tillmötesgående och det tidsspann som deltagarna uppmanas att ta hänsyn till, till exempel livslångt tillmötesgående jämfört med de senaste tre veckorna, avsevärt mellan olika studier. Dessa variationer, och det faktum att deltagarna i denna studie var tvungna att ha varit sexuellt tillmötesgående innan de deltog i undersökningen, vilket vanligtvis inte har varit ett kriterium för att delta i tidigare forskning, gjorde jämförelsen med tidigare forskning svår. Bristen på klarhet i terminologin gör det osäkert om olika studier som undersöker sexuellt tillmötesgående har mätt samma fenomen.

Framtida forskning bör fokusera på att uppnå ett större och jämnare sampel mellan olika demografiska grupper för att öka den statistiska styrkan och generaliserbarheten. För att ytterligare undersöka könsskillnaden i frekvensen av sexuellt tillmötesgående kunde framtida forskning också undersöka om det finns en könsskillnad i hur frågor om sexuellt tillmötesgående tolkas. En betydande förbättring inom forskningsområdet för sexuellt tillmötesgående skulle vara att komma överens om en universell definition av sexuellt tillmötesgående för att bättre jämföra forskningsresultat.

Sammanfattning

Denna studie undersökte hur förhållandets kvalitet och längd var associerade med frekvensen och de upplevda konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående. Ett signifikant samband mellan förhållandets längd och en ökning av frekvensen av sexuellt tillmötesgående hittades för kvinnor. Det andra signifikanta sambandet för kvinnor i denna studie var mellan förhållandekvalitet och upplevda konsekvenser av sexuellt tillmötesgående, eftersom högre förhållandekvalitet predicerade en mer positiv uppfattning om konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående. Inga signifikanta associationer hittades för män, troligen på grund av studiens brist på statistisk styrka. Sammanfattningsvis stöder resultaten från denna studie uppfattningen att förhållandeaspekter spelar en roll i hur åtminstone kvinnor upplever och agerar kring sexuellt tillmötesgående. Dessutom verkar sexuellt tillmötesgående vara ett vanligt sätt att hantera lustdiskrepans oavsett kvaliteten på förhållandet. Genom att undersöka relationsdynamik kan människor som arbetar med lustdiskrepanser hjälpa till att förbättra sexuell kvalitet och den övergripande funktionen av förhållandet.

Pressmeddelande

Forskning vid Åbo Akademi har funnit att för kvinnor korrelerar längre förhållanden med en ökad frekvens av sexuellt tillmötesgående. Dessutom upptäcktes ett samband mellan högre förhållandekvalitet och en mer positiv uppfattning om konsekvenserna av sexuellt tillmötesgående för kvinnor. Resultaten belyser vikten av förhållandeaspekter för att förstå sexuellt tillmötesgående och dess konsekvenser, åtminstone för kvinnor. Resultaten tyder på att sexuellt tillmötesgående kan ha skyddande funktioner för längre förhållande, såsom att främja intimitet. Deltagarnas svar samlades in med en webbenkät och totalt deltog 181 människor från Finland och andra länder. Forskningen utfördes av William Forsén, magisterstudent i psykologi, med handledning av docent Annika Gunst och doktorand Sabina Nickull.

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