



The Quiet Sacrifice: How Sexual Coercion Experiences Shape Women's Sexual Wellbeing

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Título: El sacrificio silencioso: cómo las experiencias de coerción sexual moldean el bienestar sexual de las mujeres.

Resumen: La coerción sexual impacta profundamente en el bienestar sexual y relacional de las mujeres, lo que requiere una comprensión de sus procesos subyacentes. Este estudio examina la relación entre la victimización por coerción sexual y la satisfacción sexual y relacional de las mujeres. Un diseño transversal no experimental con 113 mujeres en relaciones heterosexuales evaluó la relación entre las experiencias de coerción sexual, el autosilenciamiento, la orientación excesiva al sexo comunal, las razones controladas para tener sexo, la satisfacción sexual y con la relación y el deseo sexual. Los resultados indican que la victimización por coerción sexual conduce a niveles más altos de autosilenciamiento y mayor priorización de las necesidades de la pareja, lo que resulta en una menor satisfacción sexual y relacional y en un deseo sexual reducido. El estudio resalta la necesidad de abordar el autosilenciamiento y la priorización de las necesidades de la pareja en las intervenciones para las víctimas de coerción sexual, ofreciendo perspectivas para programas sensibles al género que mitiguen estos resultados negativos y fomenten el consentimiento sexual pleno.

Palabras clave: Coerción sexual. Satisfacción sexual. Satisfacción con la relación. Deseo sexual. Autosilenciamiento.

Abstract: Sexual coercion profoundly impacts women's sexual and relational well-being, necessitating an understanding of its underlying processes. This study examines the relationship between sexual coercion victimization experiences and women's sexual and relationship satisfaction. A non-experimental cross-sectional design with 113 women in heterosexual relationships assessed the relationship between experiences of sexual coercion, self-silencing, unmitigated sexual communion, controlled reasons for sex, sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and sexual desire. Findings indicate that sexual coercion victimization leads to higher levels of self-silencing and prioritization of partners' needs, resulting in lower sexual and relationship satisfaction and reduced sexual desire. The study highlights the need to address self-silencing and prioritization of partners' needs in interventions for sexual coercion victims, offering insights for gender-sensitive programs to mitigate these negative outcomes and encourage full sexual consent.

Keywords: Sexual Coercion. Sexual satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction. Sexual desire. Self-silencing.

The Quiet Sacrifice: Examining the Toll of Sexual Coercion on Women's Sexual and Relational Wellbeing

Sexual dynamics in intimate relationships are shaped by a complex interplay of psychological, interpersonal, and socio-cultural factors that deeply influence individuals' sexual and relational experiences (Beaulieu et al., 2022). Understanding these dynamics is essential not only because they shape personal identities and emotional well-being, but also because they have direct implications for the quality, satisfaction, and health of intimate bonds. In particular, these dynamics are profoundly marked by gendered expectations and societal norms, which tend to disproportionately affect women. Women are frequently caught between cultural mandates of sexual passivity and their own agency, generating a tension that contributes to unequal power relations within relationships (Balint, 2024). This imbalance can lead to miscommunication, sexual dissatisfaction, and, in many cases, lack of sexual consent (i.e. the lack of free, verbal or non-verbal expression of a person's willingness to participate in sexual activity, Hickman and Muehlenhard, 1999), and coercion (i.e. a subtle but widespread form of sexual and gender-based violence, Edwards et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2017).

Empirical evidence indicates that women are more likely to experience sexual coercion within the context of intimate relationships (Garrido-Macías et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2017). In Spain, this issue is especially pressing: studies reveal that 15% of male college students admitted to engaging in sexual behaviors when the woman did not want it (Martín et al., 2005). Among Spanish female college students, 28.5% reported having experienced some form of sexual violence in the past year, with 8.8% reporting attempted coercion and 6.5% reporting coercion (Blanco et al., 2022). Research focused on intimate partner sexual coercion using samples of Spanish female college students have found that between 45% (Garrido-Macías et al., 2020) and 63% (Garrido-Macías et al., 2022) of women had experienced at least one act of such victimization sometime in their lives.

Despite the growing body of literature on sexual coercion and its negative consequences on women's well-being, significant gaps in our understanding of deeper underlying processes—such as self-silencing, unmitigated sexual communion, and controlled sexual motivations. These processes may silently erode women's sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and sexual desire. Moreover, if these dynamics remain unaddressed, they risk becoming normalized or perpetuated across generations, reinforcing systemic gender inequalities and compromising the future of equitable intimate relationships. In a sociocultural moment increasingly attentive to gender-based violence and sexual consent, investigating these nuanced mechanisms becomes not only urgent but essential for informing preventative interventions, policy-making, and educational programs aimed at fostering health-

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ier and more egalitarian relationships. This study aims to fill this critical gap by examining how these psychological and relational variables interact and impact women's sexual and relational well-being within the context of heterosexual intimate partnerships.

Sexual Coercion in Intimate Relationships

Sexual coercion is defined as any non-consensual sexual activity obtained through force, manipulation, or the exploitation of another's inability to give informed consent (Smith, 2001), encompasses a broad range of behaviors from violent attacks to subtle forms of pressure that compel individuals to engage in sex against their will, and it includes physical force, psychological intimidation, or manipulation based on an unequal power dynamic within the relationship (Smith, 2001).

Sexual coercion is a serious issue that spans physical, psychological, and sexual women's well-being (Katz & Tirone, 2010; Smith, 2001). Specifically, women who have been sexually coerced report poorer physical health conditions and engage in harmful behaviors such as excessive alcohol consumption and illicit drug use (Fenaughty et al., 2001; Kelley et al., 2017). Furthermore, victims of sexual coercion often experience psychological consequences such as heightened anxiety, symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Campbell et al., 2009) and depression (Katz & Tirone, 2010).

Specially troublesome, sexual coercion may have negative consequences on women's behavior in the area of sexual relations. For instance, women usually suppress their desires and needs to avoid conflict with their partners or further coercion (Jack & Dill, 1992), which is named self-silencing. This self-silencing can be particularly detrimental, leading to a decrease in sexual autonomy and an increase in psychological distress (Harper et al., 2005). In the same sense, sexual coercion scenarios are environments where there is a higher probability that women internalize their sexual role of prioritizing their partner's sexual needs over their own (hereinafter called unmitigated sexual communion) and engaging in sex for controlled reasons, such as avoid conflict or partner dissatisfaction (Shoikhedbrod et al., 2022).

Finally, the consequences of sexual coercion on women's behavior also have an impact on women's sexual well-being and their intimate relationships. In particular, sexual coercion can significantly impact sexual satisfaction in intimate relationships. Research indicates that sexual coercion is negatively associated with sexual satisfaction, leading to decreased sexual satisfaction for both the victim and the perpetrator (Sáez et al., 2019). Moreover, sexual coercion significantly impacts relationship satisfaction. Research indicates that sexual coercion, whether verbal or physical, disrupts the relational dynamics, contributing to decreased satisfaction and increased conflict. For example, Katz and Myhr (2008) found that women who experienced verbal sexual coercion reported lower relationship satisfaction and more destructive

conflict patterns within their relationships. Similarly, sexual coercion disrupts the natural dynamics of sexual desire by introducing elements of fear, obligation, and psychological distress. To illustrate, Mullins and Karantzas (2019) found that avoidance motivations related to sexual coercion were linked to diminished sexual desire and satisfaction.

The Role of Self-Silence, Unmitigated and Controlled Reasons for Having Sex in Sexual Satisfaction, Relationship Satisfaction and Sexual Desire

Self-silencing is a psychological behavior where individuals suppress their thoughts, feelings, and needs, often to maintain harmony or avoid conflict (Swim et al., 2010). According to self-silencing theory (Jack, 1991), self-silencing arises from a desire to maintain relationships with others, as well as from societal gender norms that depict women as docile and submissive (Maji & Dixit, 2019). This behavior was first identified in studies exploring the relational experiences of women and the psychological impacts of adopting a more compliant role in personal interactions (Jack & Dill, 1992). The suppression of true sexual desires by self-silencing can lead to diminished sexual satisfaction, which is crucial for overall relationship health (Horne et al., 2021). Similarly, according to Horne et al. (2021), regulating sexual desire through suppression (concealing disinterest) can have significant negative effects on both sexual and relationship satisfaction.

Furthermore, unmitigated sexual communion, defined as the excessive focus on a partner's needs at the expense of one's own, leads to engaging in sex for controlled reasons, such as to avoid conflict or partner dissatisfaction (Shoikhedbrod et al., 2022). Shoikhedbrod and collaborators (2022) showed that individuals with high unmitigated sexual communion engage in sex for more controlled reasons, resulting in lower sexual satisfaction and higher sexual distress. Unmitigated sexual communion can also significantly impact relationship satisfaction. Studies suggest that individuals who engage in unmitigated sexual communion may experience lower levels of personal fulfillment and increased psychological distress, which negatively affects their overall relationship satisfaction. For example, Horne et al., (2020) explored the longitudinal links between unmitigated communion and relationship satisfaction over a seven-year period, finding that higher initial levels of unmitigated communion predicted a slower rate of decline in relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, unmitigated sexual communion can negatively affect sexual desire. In this line, previous research has shown that sexual motivation driven by external pressures or obligations is associated with lower sexual satisfaction and decreased sexual desire (Shoikhedbrod et al., 2022; Gomez-Pulido et al., 2024).

Additionally, sexual interactions perceived as obligatory or non-reciprocal due to controlled motivations, which refers to the external pressures and obligations that compel individuals to engage in certain behaviors not out of genuine

desire but due to a sense of duty, fear of negative consequences, or adherence to social expectations (Shoikhedbrod et al., 2022), can further strain the relationship. When sexual desire is regulated to meet external expectations rather than genuine interest, it not only impacts sexual satisfaction but also diminishes relationship satisfaction (Horne et al., 2021). Instead, when sexual activity is primarily motivated by external pressures or obligations, the intrinsic interest in sexual engagement can wane, impacting one's sexual desire negatively, this way, leading to long-term dissatisfaction and dysfunction in the relationship (Brezsnyak & Whisman, 2004).

Although there are no previous studies linking self-silencing with unmitigated sexual communion and controlled reasons, it is evident that these constructs are strongly related. Self-silencing, which involves suppressing one's own thoughts, emotions, and desires, could create a disconnection from one's own sexual needs, which may lead women to focus more on satisfying their partner's needs than their own (unmitigated sexual communion). This, in turn, could increase the likelihood of engaging in sexual activities for reasons of control, in an attempt to maintain harmony in the relationship or avoid conflict with their partner. This, in turn, could have profound implications for women's sexual and relational well-being, as the pressure to meet external expectations may diminish their ability to enjoy healthy and balanced sexuality.

Thus, the main objective of this article is to investigate the intricate dynamics between sexual coercion victimization and its impact on women's relational and sexual well-being. Specifically, the article aims to examine how victimization by sexual coercion is related to self-silencing, unmitigated sexual communion, and controlled reasons for sexual behavior. Additionally, the research seeks to explore the mediating role of these variables in linking experiences of sexual coercion with women's relational and sexual wellbeing sexuality, specifically sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction and sexual desire. By identifying these mediating factors, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the pathways through which sexual coercion affects women's sexual health and relationship dynamics. Specifically, our hypotheses were the following:

Hypothesis 1. Sexual coercion victims will report higher levels of self-silencing (1a), unmitigated sexual communion (1b), and controlled reasons for sex (1c) compared to non-victims. Additionally, sexual coercion victims will report lower levels of sexual satisfaction (1d), relationship satisfaction (1e), and sexual desire (1f) compared to non-victims.

Hypothesis 2. Sexual coercion victimization will lead to lower sexual satisfaction (2a), lower relationship satisfaction (2b) and lower sexual desire (2c) through increased self-silencing, unmitigated sexual communion, and controlled reasons.

Methods

Participants

The sample consisted of 113 women from the general Spanish population, ranging in age from 18 to 56 years ($M = 29.91$, $SD = 7.85$). All participants were involved in a romantic relationship with someone of the opposite sex at the time of conducting the study, with an average duration of 5.71 years ($SD = 5.66$), and 58.4% self-identified as heterosexual, 38.9% as bisexual, and 2.7% as other. A sensitivity analysis using a linear multiple regression test in G*Power (Faul et al., 2009) was conducted to assess the capacity to detect the contribution of sexual coercion victimization, self-silence, unmitigated sexual communion, and controlled reasons for engaging in sex on our outcome variables (sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and sexual desire). The findings revealed a design sufficiently sensitive (80% power) to detect a minimum effect size of $f^2 = .07$.

Instruments

Sexual Coercion Victimization: The abbreviated version by Garrido-Macías and Arriaga (2020) of the Sexual Coercion in Intimate Partner Relationship Scale (SCIRS; Shackelford & Goetz, 2004) was used to assess women's experiences of intimate partner sexual coercion. They indicated whether they had experienced at some point in their life any of 19 specific acts of intimate partner sexual coercion (e.g., "my partner hinted that if I loved him, I would have sex with him"). Women responded using a dichotomous scale (0 = never has occurred, 1 = it has happened sometime in my life). As in previous studies (e.g., Garrido-Macías et al., 2020), women who had not experienced any acts of sexual coercion were classified as non-victims, while those who had experienced at least one act of sexual coercion were classified as victims. This classification yielded a total of 58 victims and 55 non-victims of intimate partner sexual coercion within the sample.

Self-Silencing Scale (STSS; García-Jiménez, et al., in press). This instrument assesses the extent to which women silence certain feelings, thoughts, and actions to create and maintain intimate and secure relationships. The measure consists of 31 items (e.g., "I tend to judge myself by how I think other people see me"; "when my partner's needs and feelings conflict with my own, I always state mine clearly"; "I feel I have to act in a certain way to please my partner") rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicate higher levels of self-silencing ($\alpha = .90$).

Unmitigated Sexual communion (USCS; Hogue et al., 2019). This scale measures the extent to which an individual prioritizes their partner's needs, excluding their own. To ensure linguistic and conceptual equivalence of measurement instruments, the items were translated into Spanish by a group of subject matter experts, following a process of back-

translation. The scale consists of 7 items (e.g., "Even when I am exhausted, I make sure to meet my partner's sexual needs") rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher values indicate a greater tendency to prioritize a partner's needs over one's own ($\alpha = .72$).

Controlled reasons for engaging in sex: The subscale of controlled reasons of the Sexual Motivation Scale (SMS; Grave et al., 2016) was used to evaluate the extent to which participants were motivated to engage in sex for controlled reasons. Again, to ensure both linguistic and conceptual equivalence of measurement tools, a team of subject matter experts translated the items into Spanish, utilizing a back-translation process. This subscale includes 12 items (e.g., "to avoid conflicts with my partner") answered on a 7-point scale (1 = does not correspond at all; 7 = corresponds completely), with higher scores indicating greater controlled reasons for engaging in sex ($\alpha = .85$).

Sexual satisfaction: The participants' sexual satisfaction with their partner was assessed using the Spanish version of the Global Measure of Sexual Satisfaction (GMSEX; Sánchez-Fuentes et al., 2015). Participants rated their overall sexual satisfaction with their partner on five 7-point dimensions (i.e., very bad-very good; very unpleasant-very pleasant; very negative-very positive; very unsatisfying-very satisfying; worthless-very valuable), with higher scores indicating greater sexual satisfaction ($\alpha = .95$).

Relationship satisfaction. To assess relationship satisfaction, we used the satisfaction level of the Spanish version of the Investment Model Scale (IMC; Rusbult et al., 1998; Vanderdrif et al., 2014). Specifically, participants responded to five items (e.g., "I feel satisfied with our relationship") using a 9-point Likert scale from 0 (strongly disagree) to 8 (strongly agree). The mean score was calculated, with higher scores indicating a higher level of satisfaction to the relationship ($\alpha = .92$).

Sexual desire: To assess the sexual desire for women's own partner we used the partner-focused dyadic sexual desire subscale from the Spanish version of the Sexual Desire Inventory (SDI; Moyano et al., 2016). This subscale is composed of 7 items (e.g., "when you have sexual thoughts, how strong is your desire to engage in sexual behavior with your partner?") of a 9-point Likert scale (0 = no desire; 8 = strong desire), where higher scores indicated higher levels of dyadic sexual desire for one's partner ($\alpha = .90$).

Sociodemographic Characteristics. Data were collected on participants' gender, age, sexual orientation, and relationship status and length.

Procedure

The sample was recruited via non-probabilistic sampling methods through different social networks (i.e. Facebook). Specifically, participants were asked for online collaboration, providing them the informed consent and informing them about the voluntary nature of the study, the anonymity and

confidentiality of their responses, as well as the study's approximate duration. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, particular attention was paid to ethical safeguards to minimize any potential risk of stigma or retraumatization. Participants were clearly informed that they could withdraw at any time without penalty, and the survey was designed to avoid intrusive or triggering language. After providing informed consent, participants completed the study surveys embedded within a larger series of questionnaires via an online subject-recruitment platform (i.e., Qualtrics web host). No monetary compensation was provided for participation. Ethical approval was obtained from the ethical committee prior to data collection. This study employed a non-experimental cross-sectional design to analyze relationships between variables at a single point in time, without allowing for the establishment of causal relationships. To be included in the final analysis, participants had to identify their gender as female in a self-reported question included in the sociodemographic section of the questionnaire.

Analyses Strategy

First, we investigated the relations among study variables using Pearson bivariate correlation analyses, as well as the prevalence of these variables based on descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation).

Second, we conducted a one-way between-groups multivariate analysis of variance to explore the effects of sexual coercion victimization on study variables, using sexual coercion victimization as the independent variable (victims vs non-victims), and self-silence (Hypothesis 1a), unmitigated sexual communion (Hypothesis 1b), controlled reasons (Hypothesis 1c), sexual satisfaction (Hypothesis 1d), relationship satisfaction (Hypothesis 1e), and sexual desire (Hypothesis 1f) as dependent variables.

Third, we focused on examining the relation between sexual coercion and sexual and relational women's wellbeing based on rates of self-silencing, unmitigated sexual communion and controlled reasons. Specifically, three serial mediation analyses were run using PROCESS macro (Model 6; Hayes, 2022) to test whether sexual coercion predicted sexual satisfaction (Hypothesis 2a), relationship satisfaction (Hypothesis 2b) and sexual desire (Hypothesis 2c) via self-silencing, unmitigated sexual communion, and controlled reasons. We included sexual coercion as the predictor (X), self-silencing (M1), unmitigated sexual communion (M2), and controlled reasons (M3) as the mediating variables, and sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, or sexual desire as the criterion (Y). Following Hayes' (2022) procedures for testing indirect effects with serial mediators, bias-corrected confidence intervals for indirect associations were estimated based on 5.000 bootstrap samples. In these models, confidence intervals that exclude 0 indicate a statistically significant association ($p < .05$).

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Pearson bivariate correlation analyses were run to analyze the relationship among study variables, which are shown, along with descriptive statistics, in Table 1. Sexual coercion victimization was positively and significantly associated with self-silencing ($p = .01$). In turn, self-silencing, unmitigated sexual communion, and controlled reasons were positively and significantly correlated between them (with coefficients r that range between .50 and .59, $p < .001$). Furthermore, sexu-

al coercion victimization, self-silencing, unmitigated sexual communion, and controlled reasons were negatively and significantly associated with sexual satisfaction (with coefficients r that range between -.29 and -.46, $p < .01$), relationship satisfaction (with coefficients r that range between -.24 and -.41, $p < .05$), and sexual desire (with coefficients r that range between -.23 and -.36, $p < .05$; excepting for unmitigated sexual communion, whose association was not significant, $p > .05$). Finally, sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and sexual desire were positively and significantly correlated between them (with coefficients r that range between .51 and .72, $p < .001$).

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Study Variables.

	<i>M (SD)</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Sexual Coercion Victimization	--	--						
Self-Silencing	66.74 (17.66)	.24*	--					
Unmitigated Sexual Communion	2.42 (0.70)	.12	.52***	--				
Controlled Reasons	2.10 (0.95)	.17	.50***	.59***	--			
Sexual Satisfaction	28.47 (7.57)	-.36***	-.39***	-.29**	-.46***	--		
Relationship Satisfaction	5.97 (1.99)	-.22*	-.35***	-.24*	-.41***	.71***	--	
Sexual Desire	33.71 (10.43)	-.27**	-.36***	-.13	-.27**	.72***	.51***	--

Note. $N = 113$.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Sexual Coercion Victimization and its Effect on Study Variables

With the aim of examining whether having experienced sexual coercion (vs. not having experienced it) affects the variables of self-silencing, unmitigated sexual communion, controlled reasons, sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and sexual desire (Hypothesis 1) a one-way between-groups multivariate analysis of variance was conducted. Preliminary assumption testing was performed to assess normality, linearity, univariate and multivariate outliers, homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices, and multicollinearity, and no significant violations were observed.

Results indicated a statistically significant difference between victims and non-victims on the combined dependent variables, $Wilks' \lambda = .85$, $F(6, 103) = 2.97$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 p = .15$. According to Hypothesis 1a, results indicated a significant

effect of sexual coercion victimization on self-silence, $F(1, 108) = 6.10$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 p = .05$, so that victims of sexual coercion reported higher levels of self-silence than non-victims (see means in Table 2). However, Hypotheses 1b and 1c were not supported, as sexual coercion victimization was not showed a significant effect on unmitigated sexual communion, $F(1, 108) = .92$, $p = .34$, $\eta^2 p = .01$, nor controlled reasons, $F(1, 108) = 3.19$, $p = .08$, $\eta^2 p = .03$. Finally, according to Hypotheses 1d, 1e, and 1f, sexual coercion victimization was found to significantly shape sexual satisfaction $F(1, 108) = 16.46$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 p = .13$, relationship satisfaction, $F(1, 108) = 6.67$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 p = .06$, and sexual desire, $F(1, 108) = 8.88$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 p = .08$. Specifically, victims of sexual coercion reported lower levels of sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and sexual desire than non-victims (see means in Table 2).

Table 2
Effects of Sexual Coercion Victimization on Study Variables (MANOVA).

	SC NonVictims	SC Victims	<i>F</i>
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	
Self-Silencing	62.62 (14.92)	70.84 (19.49)	6.10*
Unmitigated Sexual Communion	2.36 (0.64)	2.49 (0.75)	0.92
Controlled Reasons	1.91 (0.80)	2.22 (1.04)	3.19
Sexual Satisfaction	31.36 (5.22)	25.86 (8.49)	16.46***
Relationship Satisfaction	6.48 (1.62)	5.53 (2.17)	6.67*
Sexual Desire	36.60 (8.57)	30.84 (11.39)	8.88**

Note. $N = 113$.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The indirect effect of sexual coercion victimization on sexual satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, and sexual desire

To verify whether self-silencing, unmitigated sexual communion, and controlled reasons are explanatory mechanisms in the relation between previous sexual coercion experiences and lower levels of sexual satisfaction (Hypothesis 2a), relationship satisfaction (Hypothesis 2b), and sexual desire (Hypothesis 2c), three serial mediation analyses were run using PROCESS (Model 6; Hayes, 2022).

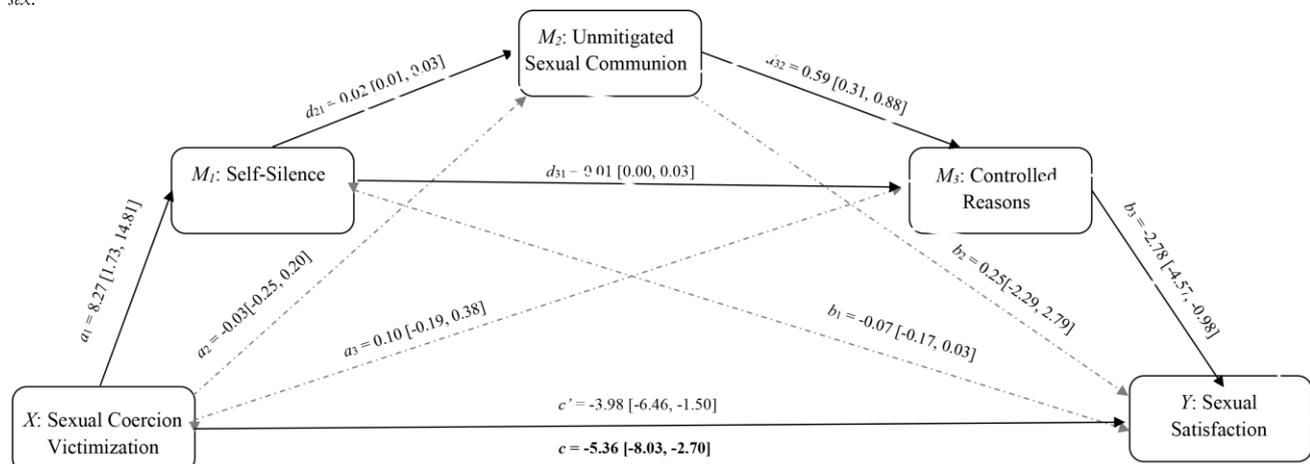
As Figure 1, 2 and 3 show, women's sexual coercion victimization directly predicted higher levels of self-silencing. Also, self-silencing was directly related to higher unmitigated sexual communion (higher priority to the partner's sexual needs). Likewise, a direct effect emerged between unmitigated sexual communion and controlled reasons, so that higher priority to the partner's sexual needs was associated with higher levels of controlled reasons to have sex. Furthermore, as Figure 1 illustrates, controlled reasons were directly relat-

ed to higher sexual satisfaction. Subsequently, the direct path between sexual coercion victimization and sexual satisfaction did emerge, showing that victims of sexual coercion showed lower sexual satisfaction (see Figure 1).

Consistent with Hypothesis 2a, sexual coercion victimization was indirectly linked to lower sexual satisfaction via the effect of sexual coercion victimization on increased self-silence, increased unmitigated sexual communion and increased controlled reasons ($b = -0.28$, $SE = 0.19$, 95% CI [-0.91, -0.05]). This pattern of results suggests that victims of sexual coercion (vs non-victims) show lower levels of sexual satisfaction by increasing women's self-silence and, in turn, increasing the focus on their partner's sexual needs which, in turn, is related to increasing controlled reasons to have sex. Finally, as Figure 1 shows, the indirect effect of sexual coercion victimization on sexual satisfaction via self-silence and controlled reasons did also emerge ($b = -0.33$, $SE = .20$, 95% CI [-0.97, -0.07]), so that sexual coercion victimization also predicted sexual satisfaction through increasing self-silence and increasing controlled reasons.

Figure 1

The indirect effect of women's sexual coercion victimization on sexual satisfaction, mediated serially by self-silence, unmitigated sexual communion, and controlled reasons for engaging in sex.



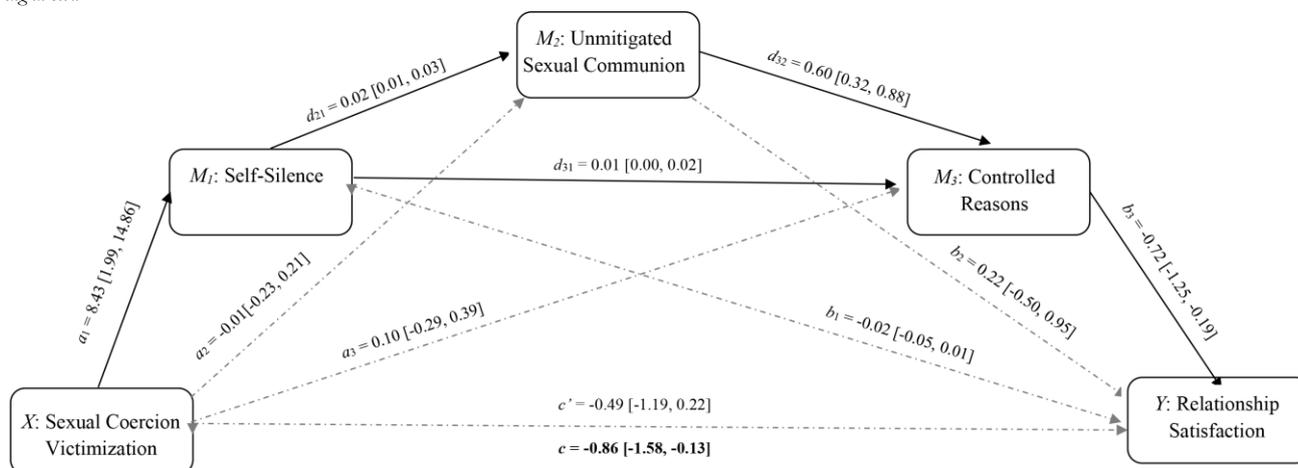
Note: Unstandardized estimates, with their 95% CIs reported between parentheses. Total effects appear in bold text.

Second, as Figure 2 illustrates, controlled reasons directly predicted lower levels of relationship satisfaction, whereas sexual coercion victimization was not directly associated with relationship satisfaction. However, according to Hypothesis 2b, sexual coercion victimization was indirectly linked to lower relationship satisfaction through increased self-silence, increased unmitigated sexual communion and increased controlled reasons ($b = -0.08$, $SE = .05$, 95% CI [-0.25, -0.02]). Concretely, these findings suggest that victims of sexual coercion (vs non-victims) report lower satisfaction with their

partner due to increasing their self-silence, which, in turn, increases the focus on their partner's sexual needs and, in turn, increasing controlled reasons to have sex. Finally, the indirect effect of sexual coercion victimization on relationship satisfaction via self-silence and controlled reasons did also emerge ($b = -0.08$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [-0.27, -0.02]), so that sexual coercion victimization predicted higher relationship satisfaction via increasing self-silence and increasing controlled reasons to have sex.

Figure 2

The indirect effect of women's sexual coercion victimization on relationship satisfaction, mediated serially by self-silence, unmitigated sexual communion, and controlled reasons for engaging in sex.



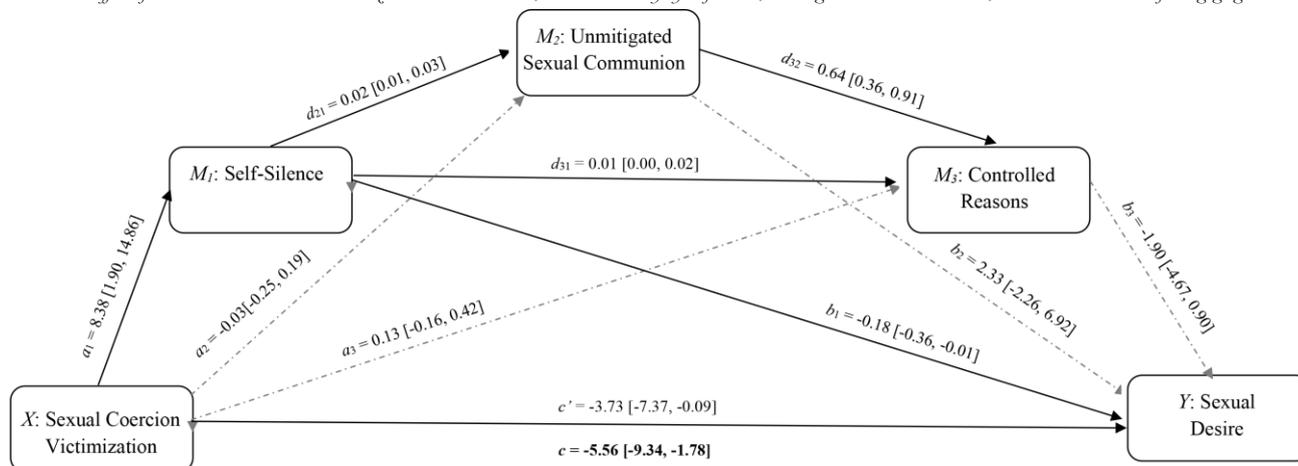
Note: Unstandardized estimates, with their 95% CIs reported between parentheses. Total effects appear in bold text.

Finally, as Figure 3 shows, the direct path between sexual coercion victimization and sexual desire did emerge, showing that victims of sexual coercion indicated lower sexual desire. However, controlled reasons did not directly predict sexual desire (see Figure 3). Thus, regarding Hypothesis 2c, there was no evidence of an indirect effect of sexual coercion victimization on sexual desire based on rates of self-silence, unmitigated sexual communion and controlled reasons ($b = -0.21, SE = 0.21, 95\% CI [-0.97, 0.01]$). Conversely, the indi-

rect effect of sexual coercion victimization on sexual desire via self-silence did emerge ($b = -1.53, SE = 0.97, 95\% CI [-4.25, -0.19]$), as well as the indirect effect of sexual coercion victimization on sexual desire through self-silence and controlled reasons ($b = -0.21, SE = 0.19, 95\% CI [-0.90, -0.00]$), so that sexual coercion victimization predicted lower sexual desire via increasing self-silence, or via increasing self-silence and increasing controlled reasons, respectively.

Figure 3

The indirect effect of women's sexual coercion victimization on sexual desire, mediated serially by self-silence, unmitigated sexual communion, and controlled reasons for engaging in sex.



Note: Unstandardized estimates, with their 95% CIs reported between parentheses. Total effects appear in bold text.

Discussion

This study focused on women's relational and sexual wellbeing and the detrimental effect of sexual coercion on the cognitive and motivational schemas that lead them to be involved in future sexual encounters, which is particularly rele-

vant due to the high prevalence of sexual coercion victimization in our cultural context (Martín et al., 2005) and the negative outcomes associated with it. Indeed, previous studies have shown that sexual coercion has negative consequences for women's wellbeing and those outcomes associated per-

sist even when the coerced person has an orgasm (Chadwick et al., 2022).

Firstly, the present study expands the research highlighting the negative impacts of sexual coercion victimization (e.g. De Visser et al., 2007), by showing that participants who reported being victims of sexual coercion experience lower sexual and relationship satisfaction, as well as reduced sexual desire, confirming the detrimental consequences reported in previous studies (Katz & Myhr, 2008; Mullins & Karantzas, 2019 and Sáez et al., 2019). Secondly, regarding the effect of the victimization on the relational schema related to intimacy and relationships, results showed female participants of this study that have reported sexual coercion victimization have also showed higher self-silencing, higher level of unmitigated sexual communion and more controlled reasons for sex, which means that women who reported experiencing sexual coercion victimization tend to prioritize their partners' needs over their own to a greater extent compared to women who did not report such victimization. In sum, it can be concluded that sexual coercion victimization has negative consequences for women's relational and personal well-being.

Thirdly, and novelly, the current study showed the mediational role of this relational schema (self-silencing, unmitigated sexual communion and controlled reasons for having sex) is the explanatory mechanism in the relation between previous sexual coercion victimization and lower sexual and relational well-being. We focused on the relational schema shaped by gender-based socialization, particularly the internalized expectation that women suppress or postpone their own desires in favor of meeting their partner's needs in general and in the context of sexuality (Gomez-Pulido et al., 2024). This framework is key to understanding the mechanisms explored in this study. Specifically, our analyses showed that silencing the self leads to higher controlled motivation for engaging in sex through higher levels of unmitigated sexual communion. This finding illustrates the insidious role of the self-silencing, whereby women acquiesce to their partner's needs despite the cost it has for them, even leading to be involved in sexual encounters not in the pursuit of pleasure, but to avoid interpersonal conflicts.

The main results of this study, consistent with recent literature (Freitag et al., 2022), demonstrated that female experiences of victimization are associated with increased self-silencing, which in turn is linked to a greater focus on meeting the partner's sexual needs. This leads to a heightened perception of external pressure to engage in sex and, ultimately, to lower satisfaction in both sexual and romantic relationships. These results combine novel research that have showed the higher self-silencing among victims of sexual violence (Freitag et al., 2022), as well as research showing that unmitigated sexual communion leads to higher controlled reasons for engaging in sex, which in turn is related to lower sexual satisfaction (Shoikhedbrod et al., 2022). This result is highly relevant for showing the deepest consequences of sexual victimization, affecting women's relational schemas

and reducing their satisfaction with sex and relationships. It is consistent with previous research that showed how sexual victimization especially impacts women's self-perception (Keshet & Gilboa-Schechtman, 2019).

Notably, the third mediational analysis reported showed that sexual coercion had not an indirect effect on female sexual desire through the proposed mediational mechanism. Despite the significant and direct effect of sexual victimization on sexual desire, which is according with previous research (Mullins & Karantzas, 2019), the expected indirect effect was not significant. Interestingly the negative effect of controlled reasons reported on females' sexual desire levels was not significant, which means that the sexual desire level is not determine of the reasons for having sex. It is important to consider that sexual desire is a complex tridimensional construct that surpasses relational and sexual satisfaction (Moyano et al., 2016), and it needs deeper study. These findings underscore the importance of further research into the role of gender mandates and cultural expectations in shaping women's sexual agency and relational wellbeing.

The present study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, it relied on self-report measures, which are particularly susceptible to social desirability bias. This is especially likely in studies addressing sensitive and intimate topics, such as sexual life and experiences of sexual violence, where participants may underreport or conceal behaviors and experiences perceived as socially undesirable or potentially damaging to their romantic relationships. Additionally, while we acknowledge that the correlational and cross-sectional design of the study means the influence of these variables could be in the opposite direction, we chose this approach based on previous research and evidence, as well as to avoid contributing to the stigma faced by victims. Lastly, the dichotomous classification of participants into victim and non-victim groups based solely on self-reported victimization presents important limitations. Not only does it prevent differentiation between women who experienced multiple forms of sexual coercion and those who experienced only one, but it also overlooks the subjective dimension of these experiences. Some women may have encountered situations consistent with sexual coercion but may not label them as such or may not identify themselves as victims, which can impact the accuracy and nuance of the classification. Future studies using a continuous variable or generating a more homogeneous sample that includes participants who have been victims of sexual coercion recently are needed to determine whether the findings from this study are replicable.

The findings presented here may assist clinicians in developing intervention programs that focus on cognitive training aimed at modifying relational cognitive schemas influenced by gender role socialization. Specifically, these programs could help individuals recognize and address patterns of coercion in relationships, which might not stem from a lack of sexual desire or satisfaction, but from the coercive dynamics themselves. This approach is particularly beneficial

for sexual victims, as it can help them rebuild healthy relationship patterns and prevent the negative consequences of such victimization in future relationships. Furthermore, the study may inform sexual education programs by emphasizing the importance of recognizing one's autonomy and needs in sexual relationships, rather than viewing sex as a means of compliance to a romantic partner's desires. These programs should center on promoting sexual autonomy, full consent, and empowerment, particularly in the context of relationships where coercion may be present. It is essential that sexual education includes a gender perspective, recognizing that victims may have little to no sexual desire or satisfaction in

coercive relationships, and that this lack of desire should not be seen as a failure to pursue one's own sexual needs.

Complementary information

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