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Associations between Conflict Negotiation Strategies, Sexual Comfort, and Sexual Satisfaction in Adolescent Romantic Relationships

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ABSTRACT

Achieving healthy and satisfying sexual relationships is a major developmental task in adolescence, but factors promoting sexual satisfaction among adolescent romantic relationships remain underexplored. Since sexuality is shaped by relational experiences, strategies mobilized to negotiate conflicts in romantic relationships could be related to sexual satisfaction through comfort in negotiating sexual experiences. Sexual comfort refers to the ease of discussing sexuality, and feeling comfortable with one's own sexual life and with others' sexual behaviors. This cross-sectional dyadic study examined the mediating role of sexual comfort in the associations between perceived conflict negotiation strategies and sexual satisfaction among adolescent romantic dyads. The actor-partner interdependence model guided the analyses of self-reported questionnaires from 104 mixed- and same-sex dyads ($M_{\text{age}} = 18.99$ years, $SD = 1.51$). An adolescent's higher compromise and lower submission were related to their own higher sexual satisfaction via their own higher sexual comfort. The results also revealed a direct association between an adolescent's higher domination and their own lower sexual satisfaction. These findings underscore the importance of considering conflict negotiation strategies and sexual comfort as key factors related to adolescents' sexual satisfaction.

Achieving healthy and satisfying sexual relationships is a major developmental task in adolescence (Tolman & McClelland, 2011). Sexual satisfaction is recognized as a sexual right and is associated with adolescents' overall well-being (Auslander et al., 2007; Carcedo et al., 2020; World Health Organization, 2010). Sexual satisfaction has commonly been conceptualized as "an affective response arising from one's subjective evaluation of the positive and negative dimensions associated with one's sexual relationship" (p. 268; Lawrance & Byers, 1995). While most definitions posit that being sexually satisfied is a subjective experience, most people consider sexual satisfaction typically includes cognitive (e.g., well-being), physical (e.g., sexual response), individual (e.g., pleasure), and relational aspects (e.g., mutuality; McClelland, 2014; Pascoal et al., 2014). Even if sexual satisfaction may be influenced by socio-cultural norms, a recent study did not find significant differences between girls' and boys' levels of sexual satisfaction (Carcedo et al., 2020).

Despite the diversity of contemporary relational configurations among adolescents, most youth typically have sexual activity within the context of a romantic relationship (Lehmiller et al., 2014; Van de Bongardt & de Graaf, 2020). Moreover, youth have more frequent sexual activity and are more likely to discuss sexuality-related topics in romantic sexual partnerships than in casual sexual partnerships (van de Bongardt & de Graaf, 2020). Although a growing number of studies have focused on adolescent sexuality (e.g., risky sexual behaviors; Wekerle et al., 2017), factors promoting sexual satisfaction among adolescent romantic relationships remain

underexplored. Moreover, although sexuality is shaped by the relational context (Dewitte et al., 2015; Maxwell & Meltzer, 2020), dyadic studies (i.e., including both partners) are largely absent from the limited literature on adolescent sexual satisfaction. Understanding factors related to adolescents' sexual satisfaction, taking into account the dyadic context, may help public health professionals develop informed sexual education.

Romantic relationships provide adolescents with opportunities to feel emotions, assert their needs and desires, and to experience sexual behaviors which inevitably bring new challenges and may lead to conflicts (Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2011). Conflicts within romantic relationships and their negotiations represent a major challenge for adolescents (Tuval-Mashiach & Shulman, 2006). While the literature supports the association between conflict management and sexual satisfaction (Allsop et al., 2021; Clymer et al., 2006; Rouleau et al., 2018), most of the studies have been based on non-dyadic data and focused on adult samples. In adolescents, sexual comfort may play a key role in this association, given that how adolescents manage their conflicts in a romantic relationship may be related to how comfortable they feel in negotiating their sexual life, which in turn might then be related to their sexual satisfaction. Sexual comfort is defined as the ease of discussing sexuality, and feeling comfortable with one's own sexual life and with others' sexual behaviors (Tromovitch, 2011). Thus, the main goal of the current study was to examine whether sexual comfort mediates the associations between perceived conflict negotiation strategies and sexual satisfaction in adolescent romantic relationships.

Conflict Negotiation Strategies and Sexual Satisfaction

Conflicts are a relatively normative and predictable feature of adolescents' romantic relationships (Simon et al., 2008). When handled with appropriate strategies, conflicts provide adolescents with opportunities to identify areas of agreement and disagreement, clarify their expectations, and enhance their relationships (Darling et al., 2008; McIsaac et al., 2008). Given their outcomes on relationships, compromise (i.e., searching for an acceptable solution for both partners) is a constructive conflict negotiation strategy, whereas domination (i.e., persuading or coercing the other) and interactional reactivity (i.e., verbal aggression and emotional volatility) are perceived as destructive (Zacchilli et al., 2009). Some strategies can be more or less constructive depending on the nature of the interaction, such as avoidance (i.e., precluding conflicts before they occur), submission (i.e., complying with the partner's desires), and separation (i.e., cooling-off before discussing the issue; Zacchilli et al., 2009). When couples are able to effectively resolve conflicts, they can be emotionally close, which in turn may increase the partners' sexual satisfaction (Rouleau et al., 2018).

Studies have extensively documented how adaptive conflict negotiation prevents relationship dissolution and promotes relationship satisfaction in adults (Bertoni & Bodenmann, 2010; Dijkstra et al., 2017; Fincham & Beach, 2010; Roberson et al., 2015; Scheeren et al., 2014). A recent study examined the associations between conflict negotiation strategies and relationship satisfaction in adolescents. In a daily diary study among 186 adolescents ($M_{\text{age}} = 17.08$), on days when participants successfully resolved disagreements, they reported higher relationship satisfaction and on days they reported higher destructive strategies, they reported lower relationship satisfaction (Todorov et al., 2021). As conflict negotiation strategies are related to relationship outcomes in adolescence, these strategies might interfere with adolescent sexual satisfaction. Moreover, conflict-adjacent factors are related to sexual satisfaction in adolescents. Indeed, among adolescent samples, depression, hostility, interpersonal sensitivity, tension, and negative affect were related to lower sexual satisfaction (Auslander et al., 2007; Carcedo et al., 2020; Montesi et al., 2013).

Few studies have examined the association between conflict negotiation strategies and sexual satisfaction. In a sample of 166 adult couples, a person's report of reaching a solution during a disagreement was associated with both their own and their partner's greater sexual satisfaction (Rouleau et al., 2018). In a sample of 2,114 newly married mixed-sex couples ($M_{\text{age wives}} = 27.86$; $M_{\text{age husbands}} = 29.76$), the wives' conflict resolution quality was positively associated with the wives' sexual satisfaction, and the husbands' conflict resolution quality was positively associated with the husbands' sexual satisfaction (Allsop et al., 2021). In a sample of 200 college students ($M_{\text{age}} = 27.00$), verbal aggression was related to lower sexual satisfaction, whereas no association was found between violence or reasoning strategies and sexual satisfaction (Clymer et al., 2006). Even though these studies among adults suggest an association between different conflict negotiation strategies and

sexual satisfaction, they did not assess strategies frequently used by adolescents to negotiate conflicts in romantic relationships. Notably, adolescents tend to withdraw from disagreements rather than let them interfere with the couple's harmony (Appel & Shulman, 2015).

Conflict Negotiation Strategies and Sexual Comfort

Adolescents may be particularly uncomfortable with sexuality since they are just learning to navigate the new and unfamiliar realm of sexuality (Collins et al., 2009). As adolescents grow older, sexual activity becomes more normative, and they may feel more sexually comfortable (Tolman & McClelland, 2011). Studies that address adolescents' comfort with sexuality generally adopt a risk-based approach focusing on sexual health, rather than a sex-positive discourse emphasizing the recognition of pleasure and satisfaction during adolescence. For example, in one study with a sample of 1,039 adolescents ($M_{\text{age}} = 13.27$), the level of comfort while communicating about sexual issues with friends was related to increased condom use among sexually active adolescents, while comfort with dating partners was associated with being sexually active and with less intention to delay intercourse (Guzman et al., 2003). In this study, slightly more than half of the participants (52%) reported feeling comfortable talking about sexuality with their dating partners.

When partners can safely express their point of view in negotiating conflicts, they may also feel comfortable expressing themselves in other domains of their romantic relationships, namely in their sexuality. In adult couples, perceiving a partner as understanding during times of conflict revealed a buffering effect against the negative effects of conflicts, as it helped build intimacy, and helped the partner feel cared about and secure in the relationship despite the difficulties encountered (Gordon & Chen, 2016). Therefore, when a conflict is managed using constructive strategies such as compromise and separation, perceived understanding may promote partners' sexual comfort, including sexual self-disclosure and sexual communication. Conversely, when couples negotiate conflicts using destructive strategies such as dominance, submission, avoidance, and interactional reactivity, a lack of perceived understanding may hinder partners' sexual comfort.

Given that sexual satisfaction is enhanced by sexual self-disclosure (Tang et al., 2013) and sexual communication (Byers, 2011; Mark & Jozkowski, 2013; Widman et al., 2014), sexual satisfaction seems to be intertwined with one's sexual comfort. In a sample of 2,168 university students ($M_{\text{age}} = 20.20$), greater sexual self-comfort was strongly associated with greater sexual satisfaction in men and women (Higgins et al., 2011). However, one's own sexual satisfaction may also depend on one's partner's sexual comfort. In a qualitative study of 56 adolescents ($M_{\text{age}} = 17.50$), participants not only stated that it was important to feel comfortable with a partner for one's own sexual pleasure, but also identified their partner's sexual comfort as favoring their own sexual comfort (Salières et al., 2017).

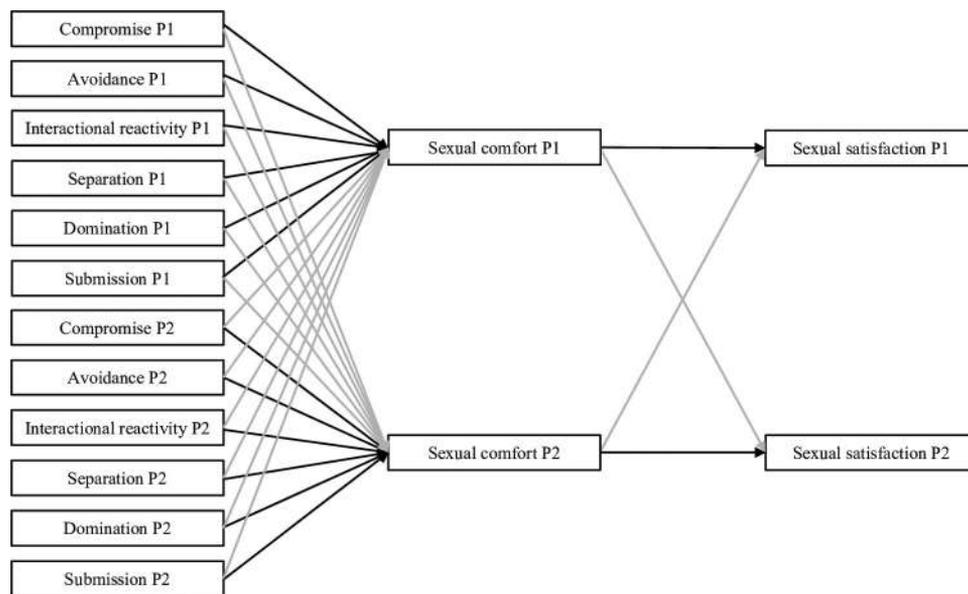


Figure 1. Actor-partner interdependence mediation model examining sexual comfort as a mediator in the associations between perceived conflict negotiation strategies and sexual satisfaction. Hypothesized actor effects are represented by black solid lines and hypothesized partner effects are represented by a gray solid lines. P = Partner.

Current Study

The goal of the current study was to examine, using a dyadic perspective, the mediating role of sexual comfort in the associations between perceived conflict negotiation strategies and sexual satisfaction among adolescent romantic relationships. The hypothesized mediation model is presented in Figure 1. Based on previous research, we hypothesized that an adolescent's perceived constructive negotiation strategies such as compromise and separation would be positively related to their own and their partner's greater sexual comfort, which in turn would be positively associated with their own and their partner's sexual satisfaction. Conversely, we predicted that an individual's perceived destructive negotiation strategies such as dominance, submission, avoidance, and interactional reactivity would be negatively related to their own and their partner's lower sexual comfort, which in turn would be positively associated with their own and their partner's sexual satisfaction.

Method

Participants

The data were collected between 2013 and 2014 as part of the Youths' Romantic Relationships Project (Hébert et al., 2017), which focused on communication and conflict negotiation among adolescent romantic relationships. Participants included 104 mixed- and same-sex dyads ($n = 208$ participants) recruited from the greater Montreal area. A total of 22 dyads were recruited through the study's promotional e-mail using a mailing list of adolescents who consented to be contacted for other studies and participated in a previous phase of the project (i.e., a longitudinal study with 8194 adolescents from 34 high schools (Hébert et al., 2017). Additional participants were recruited by direct solicitations through living environments (e.g., parks, libraries, schools, and organizations) and through

word of mouth. To be eligible, partners needed to be aged between 15 and 21 years old, and in a romantic relationship for at least two months. To represent typical youth experiences and ensure homogeneity of the sample, dyads living together or taking care of a dependent child were excluded.

The sample consisted of eight same-sex and 96 mixed-sex dyads together for an average of 17.46 months ($SD = 15.24$). Among the 208 participants, 51.0% were girls and 49.0% were boys, with an average age of 18.99 years old ($SD = 1.51$). Most participants were sexually active (97.6%) and the average age at first sexual experience was 15.75 years old ($SD = 1.59$). In the sample, 67.8% reported being sexually attracted only to individuals of a different sex, 10.6% mostly to different sexes, 7.7% to both sexes, 6.7% mostly to same-sex, 5.3% only to same-sex, 1.4% were uncertain, and 0.5% were attracted to no one. About a quarter of the participants (24.0%) were in a romantic relationship for the first time. With regard to ethnicity, 61.5% self-identified as Canadian, 8.7% were European, 6.3% were Hispanic, 4.3% were Asian, 4.3% were Caribbean, 1.4% were African, and 1.0% were First Nations. Regarding the current academic level, 29.3% were in high school or its equivalent, 33.2% in college, 25.5% in university, 7.2% were not in school, and 4.8% did not answer the question.

Procedure

Dyads were invited to manifest their interest in the study via e-mail. Potential dyads were contacted and screened via telephone. When eligible, dyads were invited to the Laboratory of Violence and Sexuality to complete the self-reported questionnaires. Upon arrival, the dyad partners were separated into rooms where a research assistant presented in detail the study protocol to ensure informed consent and adequate understanding of the study's goals, procedures, risks, and benefits.

Prior to the survey completion, all participants gave their informed consent, and all adolescents could participate in the study without parental consent, as this study involved minimal risk. After signing the consent form, both partners individually completed the French version of the questionnaires on their current romantic relationship, sex life, conflict negotiation, interpersonal trauma and sociodemographic characteristics (average completion time of 40 minutes). Each partner received CAN\$25 as financial compensation. This study was approved by the institutional research ethics board of the authors' affiliated university.

Measures

Sociodemographic Characteristics

Participants completed a sociodemographic questionnaire with questions about sex, age, parents' cultural background, sexual identity, and relationship length. Participants also answered a few questions related to their prior sexual experiences including about whether they had ever been sexually active and their age when they first engaged in consensual sexual activities.

Conflict Negotiation Strategies

The Romantic Partner Conflict Scale (RPCS; Zacchilli et al., 2009) was used to measure each partner's perception of the conflict negotiation strategies used by the dyad to manage recent disagreements. This 18-item measure included six subscales (three items each): (1) compromise (e.g., in order to resolve conflicts, we try to reach a compromise), (2) avoidance (e.g., I avoid conflict with my partner), (3) interactional reactivity (e.g., my partner and I have frequent conflicts), (4) separation (e.g., when we experience conflict, we let ourselves calm down before discussing it further), (5) domination (e.g., when we argue or fight, I try to win), and (6) submission (e.g., I surrender to my partner when we disagree on an issue). All items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Total scores on each subscale ranged from 0 to 12, with higher scores indicating greater perception of the mobilization of the strategy in conflict negotiation within the current romantic relationship. Initially developed for a sample of newly formed couples, this instrument has shown good psychometric properties in a sample of youths with acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$ to $.96$) and appropriate one-month test-retest correlations ($r = .70$ to $.85$; Zacchilli et al., 2009). In the current sample, ordinal coefficient alphas ranged from $.59$ to $.85$, which were considered acceptable as alpha coefficients are strongly influenced by the number of items (Cortina, 1993).

Sexual Comfort

The Sexual Comfort Subscale of the Sexual Behaviors Questionnaire (SBQ; Welsh et al., 2003), designed by the Study of Tennessee Adolescent Romantic Relationships (STARR) Project, was used to assess adolescents' comfort with sexuality within their current romantic relationship. This five-item subscale included items about adolescents' comfort when: (1) talking about sexuality; (2) initiating sexual activities (i.e., kissing, touching, sexual intercourse); (3)

refusing sexual activities; (4) discussing contraception or protection against sexually transmitted infections; and (5) discussing what is and what is not sexually allowed outside of their relationship. The items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*very uncomfortable*) to 4 (*very comfortable*). Total scores varied between 0 and 20, with higher scores indicating greater sexual comfort. In the current sample, the ordinal coefficient alpha was $.76$.

Sexual Satisfaction

A subscale of the World Health Organization Quality of Life Assessment (WHOQOL; WHOQOL Group, 1998) was used to measure the general appreciation of the individual's subjective well-being about his or her sex life within their current romantic relationship. This subscale includes four items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*): "How well are your sexual needs fulfilled?," "Are you bothered by any difficulty in your sex life?," "How satisfied are you with your sex life?," "How would you rate your sex life?." Total scores ranged from 4 to 20, with higher scores indicating higher levels of sexual satisfaction. In the current sample, the ordinal coefficient alpha was $.86$.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive and correlation analyses were computed, using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 26.0), to describe the sample characteristics and associations between study variables. The hypothesized mediational model was performed in *Mplus* version 8.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2019), using path analysis to examine whether partners' sexual comfort mediated the associations between partners' perceived conflict negotiation strategies and sexual satisfaction. Path analysis, a subtype of structural equation modeling (SEM) without latent variables and measurement model, was used to test the actor-partner interdependence model (APIM; Kenny et al., 2006). The APIM accounts for the interdependence between partners and allows for the examination of actor effects (e.g., the association between one's own sexual comfort and own sexual satisfaction) and partner effects (e.g., association between the partner's sexual comfort and one's own sexual satisfaction). Covariances between perceived conflict negotiation strategies and between partners were included in the model. An omnibus test of distinguishability in which variance for each variable as well as actor and partner effects were constrained to be equal across boys and girls in mixed-sex dyads was computed to examine if the associations were significantly different between boys and girls and whether the participant's sex should be used as a distinguishable variable in the model (Kenny et al., 2006). The difference between the constrained model and the freely estimated model was not significant, $\chi^2(66) = 67.69$, $p = .419$. Therefore, all mixed-sex and same-sex dyads were combined and treated as indistinguishable dyads. Each partner was randomly assigned as "Partner 1" and "Partner 2," and equality constraints were added on all parameters between partners (i.e., variance, actor effects, partner effects, means, and intercepts; West, 2013). As Preacher and Hayes (2008) recommended to determine the significance of indirect effects in a mediation model,

a 95% bootstrap confidence interval around the estimate of the indirect effect ($a*b$) was computed using 20,000 bootstrapping samples. Bootstrapping is a nonparametric resampling technique in which the indirect effect is computed multiple times and a sampling distribution generated to obtain a confidence interval of the indirect effect. If zero is not in the interval, the indirect effect is considered significant.

Model fits were considered satisfactory when they met recommended guidelines as in SEM (Kline, 2015): a non-significant chi-square value, a comparative fit index (CFI) value of .95 or higher, a root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) below .06, and a standardized root-mean-square residual (SRMR) below .08 (Kline, 2015). The mediational model was tested using maximum likelihood parameter estimates with robust standard errors (MLR). There were no missing data on any of the study variables, which is a notable advantage of completing the questionnaires during an in-person session.

Results

Descriptive and Correlational Analyses

The means, standard deviations, range, and bivariate correlations for the partners' perceived conflict negotiation strategies, sexual comfort, and sexual satisfaction are presented in Table 1. Correlations showed that an adolescent's compromise was positively associated with one's own sexual comfort, whereas an adolescent's interactional reactivity and submission were negatively associated with one's own sexual comfort. An adolescent's interactional reactivity and domination were negatively related to their own sexual satisfaction. An adolescent's sexual comfort was positively associated with their own sexual

satisfaction. Nonsignificant associations were found between an adolescent's perceived conflict negotiation strategies and their partner's perceived comfort or satisfaction, and between an adolescent's sexual comfort and their partner's sexual satisfaction.

Preliminary correlational analyses were conducted to examine the associations between sociodemographic variables (i.e., sex, age, parents' cultural background, sexual identity, relationship length, being sexually active, and age at first consensual sexual activities) and the study outcomes. Only sex was significantly related to sexual comfort (i.e., sexual comfort: $r = -.16, p = .025$; sexual satisfaction: $r = -.05, p = .518$) and was added in the model as a covariate.

Actor-Partner Interdependence Mediation Model

A path analysis model was tested to examine the actor and partner associations between perceived conflict negotiation strategies, sexual comfort, and sexual satisfaction. Sex was included as a covariate. This model, presented in Table 2, fits the data well with satisfactory fit indices: $\chi^2(88) = 87.38, p = .499$; RMSEA = .00, 90% CI [.00 to .05]; CFI = 1.00; SRMR = .07. The significant associations are shown in Figure 2. The results show that an adolescent's higher levels of compromise and lower levels of submission during conflict negotiation were related to their own higher sexual comfort with small effect sizes. An adolescent's higher sexual comfort was associated with their own greater sexual satisfaction with a moderate effect size. The results also showed a negative association between an adolescent's domination and their own sexual satisfaction, with a small effect size.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations between conflict negotiation strategies, sexual comfort, and sexual satisfaction ($n = 208$ participants; 104 dyads).

	Range	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1. Compromise	3–12	9.70 (2.00)	<u>.20*</u>	–.02	–.29***	.16	–.11	–.15*	<u>.25***</u>	.03
2. Avoidance	0–12	6.61 (3.37)	–.03	<u>.11</u>	.02	–.01	.11	<u>.24***</u>	–.07	–.10
3. Interactional reactivity	0–12	2.41 (2.31)	–.28***	–.02	<u>.65***</u>	.06	<u>.32***</u>	<u>.19*</u>	–.16*	–.14*
4. Separation	0–12	5.34 (2.46)	–.13	.00	.11	<u>.16</u>	–.06	.11	.01	–.08
5. Domination	0–12	6.89 (2.68)	–.18*	–.02	<u>.26***</u>	–.12	<u>.08</u>	–.05	–.08	–.15*
6. Submission	0–12	4.25 (2.73)	–.01	.08	.17*	<u>.06</u>	<u>.25***</u>	–.14	–.24***	–.09
7. Sexual comfort	9–20	17.53 (2.32)	.02	–.03	–.04	–.11	–.09	–.02	<u>.22*</u>	<u>.35***</u>
8. Sexual satisfaction	10–20	17.18 (2.47)	.01	–.07	–.07	–.03	–.03	.03	<u>.13</u>	<u>.33**</u>

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. Correlations presented above the diagonal represent actor associations, correlations along the diagonal (underlined) represent between partners correlations, and correlations below the diagonal represent partner associations.

Table 2. Actor-partner interdependence mediation model of the role of sexual comfort between perceived conflict negotiation strategies and sexual satisfaction ($n = 208$ participants; 104 dyads).

	Sexual comfort						Sexual satisfaction					
	Actor effect			Partner effect			Actor effect			Partner effect		
	<i>b</i> (SE)	β	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i> (SE)	β	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i> (SE)	β	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i> (SE)	β	<i>p</i>
Compromise	0.25 (0.09)	.21	.004	–0.03 (0.10)	–.03	.769	–0.08 (0.08)	–.07	.263	–0.06 (0.09)	–.05	.506
Avoidance	–0.00 (0.05)	–.00	.963	0.00 (0.04)	.01	.924	–0.05 (0.05)	–.07	.302	–0.07 (0.05)	–.10	.131
Interactional reactivity	–0.12 (0.10)	–.12	.246	0.16 (0.09)	.16	.066	–0.09 (0.09)	–.09	.331	–0.03 (0.08)	–.03	.712
Separation	–0.02 (0.07)	–.02	.819	–0.06 (0.07)	–.06	.426	–0.09 (0.05)	–.08	.115	–0.00 (0.07)	–.00	.959
Domination	–0.06 (0.06)	–.07	.337	–0.02 (0.06)	–.02	.764	–0.12 (0.06)	–.13	.037	0.03 (0.06)	.03	.678
Submission	–0.16 (0.07)	–.19	.016	–0.06 (0.07)	–.07	.404	0.05 (0.06)	.05	.442	0.12 (0.07)	.13	.091
Sex	–0.36 (0.58)	–.08	.535	0.13 (0.58)	.03	.824	0.99 (0.62)	.20	.109	1.19 (0.64)	.24	.064
Sexual comfort							0.36 (0.09)	.34	<.001	0.08 (0.08)	.07	.326

b = unstandardized coefficient. SE = standard error. β = standardized coefficient. Evidence of statistically significant associations at $p < .05$ are presented in bold.

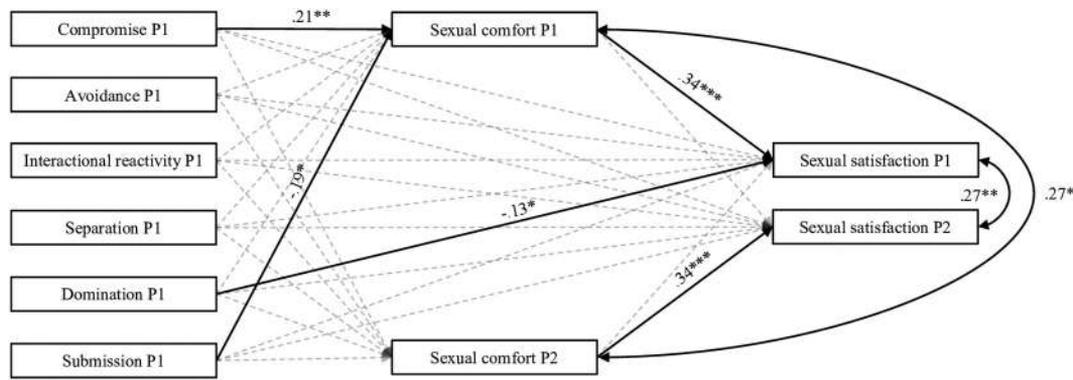


Figure 2. Actor-partner interdependence mediation model depicting the associations between perceived conflict negotiation strategies, sexual comfort, and sexual satisfaction. Since dyads are indistinguishable, only one's own and partner's associations of one member of the dyad are presented. Standardized coefficients are only provided for significant paths. Significant actor effects are represented by black solid lines. Nonsignificant paths are represented by gray dashed lines. The effects of sex and all covariances between perceived conflict negotiation strategies were estimated in the model but not reported for the sake of clarity. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 3. Results of indirect effects of perceived conflict negotiation strategies on one's own and partner's sexual satisfaction via one's own and partner's sexual comfort.

	Actor sexual satisfaction		Partner sexual satisfaction	
	Via actor sexual comfort	Via partner sexual comfort	Via actor sexual comfort	Via partner sexual comfort
	b [95% CI]	b [95% CI]	b [95% CI]	b [95% CI]
Compromise	.088 [.026, .183]	-.002 [-.040, .011]	.019 [-.014, .077]	-.010 [-.097, .058]
Avoidance	-.001 [-.034, .040]	.000 [-.007, .013]	.000 [-.013, .010]	.001 [-.031, .033]
Interactional reactivity	-.043 [-.148, .024]	.012 [-.010, .063]	-.009 [-.065, .005]	.058 [-.005, .145]
Separation	-.006 [-.056, .051]	-.004 [-.046, .005]	-.001 [-.028, .009]	-.021 [-.073, .035]
Domination	-.022 [-.075, .025]	-.001 [-.027, .007]	-.005 [-.040, .004]	-.007 [-.056, .043]
Submission	-.057 [-.138, -.009]	-.004 [-.045, .004]	-.012 [-.054, .009]	-.021 [-.088, .026]

b = unstandardized coefficient. CI = confidence interval. Evidence of an effect of 95% bias-corrected bootstrapping confidence intervals that did not include zero are presented in bold.

The results of the bootstrapping indirect effects are reported in Table 3 and show two significant indirect effects. An adolescent's compromise was positively associated with their own sexual satisfaction through their own sexual comfort. An adolescent's submission was negatively associated with their own sexual satisfaction through their own sexual comfort. Overall, the model explained 14.3% of the variance in sexual comfort and 19.4% of the variance in sexual satisfaction.

Discussion

As factors promoting sexual satisfaction are underexplored using dyadic data in adolescent romantic relationships, we tested the potential mediating role of sexual comfort in the associations between perceived conflict negotiation strategies and sexual satisfaction. An adolescent's higher compromise and lower submission during conflict negotiation were related to their own higher sexual satisfaction through their own higher sexual comfort. These actor associations suggest that compromise and submission are the two conflict negotiation strategies that are primarily related to adolescent sexuality. Moreover, the results also revealed a direct association between an adolescent's higher domination and their own lower sexual satisfaction. Our findings revealed that sexual comfort may be a useful milestone in understanding the relationship between how adolescents manage their conflicts in a romantic relationship and their satisfaction with their sex lives. However, the amount of variance explained in sexual comfort and satisfaction was modest, suggesting that conflict negotiation strategies are one of several

factors that may be related to these sexual outcomes in adolescent romantic dyads. For instance, as sexual satisfaction is complex and may be related to several aspects (e.g., psychological, physical, individual, and/or relational), important factors beyond those related to conflicts may be associated with this outcome.

Adolescents who perceive their relationship as one where both partners are willing to find common ground during conflicts are more likely to feel comfortable with sexuality and, therefore, report greater sexual satisfaction. While one study reported a nonsignificant association between conflict resolution and sexual satisfaction (Clymer et al., 2006), our results are in line with other studies in which higher conflict resolution quality was related to greater sexual satisfaction among adults (Allsop et al., 2021; Rouleau et al., 2018). Additionally, our results support previous research among adults showing that compromise is correlated with higher self-disclosure and sexual communication (Zacchilli et al., 2009), which in turn are related to higher sexual satisfaction (Byers, 2011; Mark & Jozkowski, 2013; Tang et al., 2013; Widman et al., 2014). Being able to consider one's own and one's partner's needs and desires when managing conflicts in adolescence seems to be transferable to sexuality, where adolescents also feel comfortable expressing their genuine sexual preferences and limits because, as a couple, they adequately manage different opinions and find compromises that respect both partners. This comfort in sexuality then promotes the individual's sexual satisfaction because their desires and limits are probably more likely to be respected as they are expressed.

Adolescents who perceive that they are complying with their partner's desires during conflicts are less likely to feel comfortable with sexuality and, consequently, report lower sexual satisfaction. Equity theory posits that perceived equity or inequity regarding inputs and outcomes in interpersonal interactions impacts one's own subjective evaluation of the relationship (Adam, 1965). Previous studies have reported that feeling subordinate to a partner is associated with less intimacy, stability, and self-expression compared to equal or dominant status (Bay-Cheng et al., 2018; Neff & Suizzo, 2006). Given that greater equity enhances sexual satisfaction, power-imbalanced relationships may be less sexually satisfying as they interfere with open communication about sexual desires and preferences. Adolescents who sacrifice their needs and desires at the expense of their partner's in response to conflicts may feel uncomfortable with sexuality because they are apprehensive that their sexual preferences and limits will not be respected if they express them and that they will have to submit to their partner's, or they may even devalue their own needs and desires and never express them. This lower comfort in sexuality is then related to the individual's lower sexual satisfaction, as their desires and limits are not taken into account in the couple's sexuality. Alternatively, submission as a conflict negotiation strategy may represent self-silencing, an inefficient strategy for reducing conflicts and preserving relationship harmony that may be maintained in sexuality, leading adolescents to avoid expressing themselves during sexual activities (i.e., sexual self-silencing; Jack, 1991, 1999). A recent study showed that silencing one's self in sexuality was related to negative individual, relationship, and sexual well-being (Traeen et al., 2021). Adolescents who self-silence their needs and desires in response to conflict may do the same in sexuality and engage in sexual activities that do not meet their own desires, therefore reducing their comfort with sexuality with their partner and their sexual satisfaction. Even if this interpretation is in line with the current study's findings, future research should examine this assumption.

The findings also show that adolescents who perceived higher domination reported lower sexual satisfaction. Domination involves persuading or forcing someone to take one's side in order to gain control and get what one wants (Zacchilli et al., 2009). Thus, this strategy may translate into sexuality through negative intimate experiences such as sexual coercion. Previous studies have shown that the need for control and power are shared predictors of sexual coercion perpetration and victimization in male and female adolescents (Fernandez-Fuertes et al., 2018). Past research indicates that unequal power distribution leads subordinate partners to express more anger and frustration and dominant partners to feel guilt over their status in the relationship, leading to lower psychological well-being and relationship satisfaction (Sprecher, 2018). Although domination as a conflict negotiation strategy was unrelated to sexual comfort, it may interfere more specifically with sexual communication or even sexual violence, and thus be related to adolescents' sexual satisfaction because a partner's sexual desires and limits may not always be respected.

Adolescent perceived conflict negotiation strategies revealed nonsignificant associations with their partner's sexual comfort and satisfaction. Past studies among adult couples revealed mixed findings on the association between one's own

perception of conflict resolution and one's partner's sexual satisfaction; one study reported a significant partner association (Rouleau et al., 2018) whereas the other indicated a nonsignificant partner association (Allsop et al., 2021). The lack of partner effects in the current research suggests that adolescents' perception of their relationship may contribute more to their own sexual satisfaction than their partner's perception. This is in line with recent evidence that a partner's perception of the relationship does not explain relationship satisfaction beyond individual reports (Joel et al., 2020). In adolescence, youth appear to focus more on maximizing personal gains (Laursen & Jensen-Campbell, 1999), which may explain why most associations between one's own perceptions and one's partner's sexual outcomes were nonsignificant in our model.

Limitations and Future Studies

The results of this study should be considered in light of some limitations. First, the cross-sectional design makes it impossible to determine causal relations. Future studies should use intensive longitudinal methods and rely on complex system approaches to examine the links between conflict negotiation strategies, sexual comfort, and sexual satisfaction. These approaches apprehend the complexity of causality within a multilevel understanding, and reciprocal relations and interaction between the variables under study over time (Galea et al., 2010). Second, our findings must be understood in the context of the sample characteristics that might affect statistical inference, i.e., mostly heterosexual school-attending adolescents with little cultural diversity. Moreover, even if our sample included both same-sex and mixed-sex dyads, the sample was too small to examine potential differences with regard to gender or types of dyads. Future studies should replicate our conclusions in larger samples, including more sex/gender and cultural diversity, and based on random rather than convenience sampling. Third, even if the sexual comfort scale displayed adequate psychometric properties, further validity testing of this measure should be performed to ensure adequate construct validity. Fourth, ordinal coefficient alpha for one of the conflict negotiation strategies examined (i.e., separation) was low in the present study, which may have biased the findings as this concept may not have been adequately captured. Finally, due to the modest explained variance in our study, future studies should investigate other potentially important predictors and mediators that may help understand sexual comfort and satisfaction (e.g., sexual communication, power dynamics, sexual self-silencing, sexual violence).

Implications

Understanding adolescent sexuality has important implications because this critical developmental period offers a window of opportunity to promote sexual well-being via informed sexual education (Kar et al., 2015). The findings underscore the importance of considering conflict negotiation strategies and sexual comfort as key factors related to adolescents' sexual satisfaction. Sexual satisfaction is complex and requires focus on multiple areas of the relationship, including the difficulties encountered

in romantic relationships and how adolescents perceive responding to them. In light of the evidence of associations between conflict negotiation strategies and sexual satisfaction, interventions can consider promoting constructive conflict negotiation strategies to enhance sexual satisfaction in adolescents. Considering that conflict engagement choice is deeply tied to partners' sexual comfort and overall sexual satisfaction within adolescent romantic relationships, encouraging consideration of each other's desires and reducing power dynamics in response to conflict seems to be a valuable avenue for fostering adolescents' sexual satisfaction. Our findings reiterate the salience of supporting adolescents in forging romantic relationships based on equity and mutuality (Lamb, 2010). Our mediational model also suggests that sexual comfort must be considered to better understand adolescents' sexual satisfaction. Interventions should aim to promote sexual comfort by normalizing open discussions about sexuality and sexual pleasure in adolescence and by promoting adolescents' ability to identify and negotiate their sexual desires, needs, and limits in their sexuality. All actions should be supported by the inclusion of policy measures in sex education curricula that address sexual comfort and difficulties encountered as well as strategies for overcoming these challenges, not only in sexuality but also more broadly in romantic relationships, as these two domains are intrinsically interrelated.

Conclusion

This study moved beyond the past, mostly non-dyadic data among adult samples, by using a dyadic framework to examine the associations between perceived conflict negotiation strategies and sexual satisfaction via sexual comfort in adolescent romantic relationships. The present study offers new insights by demonstrating the mediating role of one's own sexual comfort between an adolescent's compromise and one's own sexual satisfaction, and an adolescent's submission and one's own sexual satisfaction. In addition, a direct association was found between an adolescent's domination and their own sexual satisfaction. The findings highlighted key targets, namely conflict negotiation strategies and sexual comfort, for informed sexual education interventions to promote adolescents' sexual satisfaction.

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Data Availability Statement

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

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