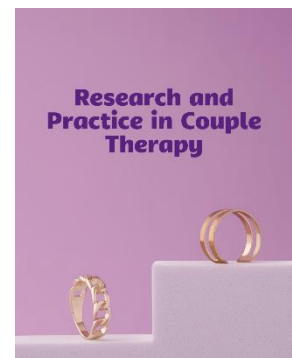




# Impact of Sexual Self-Esteem on Emotional Connection Mediated by Interpersonal Vulnerability

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## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the impact of sexual self-esteem on emotional connection in romantic relationships, with interpersonal vulnerability as a mediating variable. A descriptive correlational design was employed, involving a sample of 360 adults in committed romantic relationships residing in urban areas of Morocco. Participants were selected based on the Morgan and Krejcie sample size table and completed validated questionnaires measuring sexual self-esteem, interpersonal vulnerability, and emotional connection. Data were analyzed using SPSS-27 for descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analysis, and AMOS-21 for structural equation modeling (SEM) to assess direct, indirect, and total effects among variables and model fit. Pearson correlations revealed a significant positive association between sexual self-esteem and emotional connection ( $r = .52, p < .01$ ), a negative association between sexual self-esteem and interpersonal vulnerability ( $r = -.48, p < .01$ ), and a negative association between interpersonal vulnerability and emotional connection ( $r = -.43, p < .01$ ). SEM results indicated that sexual self-esteem had a significant direct effect on emotional connection ( $\beta = 0.39, p < .001$ ) and a significant indirect effect through interpersonal vulnerability ( $\beta = 0.15, p < .001$ ). The total effect of sexual self-esteem on emotional connection was  $\beta = 0.54 (p < .001)$ . The model demonstrated good fit indices:  $\chi^2/df = 1.94$ , GFI = 0.95, CFI = 0.97, TLI = 0.96, and RMSEA = 0.051. The findings support that sexual self-esteem is a significant predictor of emotional connection in romantic relationships and that this relationship is partially mediated by interpersonal vulnerability. Enhancing individuals' sexual self-esteem and reducing vulnerability may foster deeper emotional intimacy. The model provides a theoretical and empirical foundation for interventions targeting emotional closeness through intrapersonal growth.

**Keywords:** Sexual self-esteem; emotional connection; interpersonal vulnerability; romantic relationships

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## Introduction

Emotional connection between romantic partners is a fundamental component of relational well-being, encompassing feelings of intimacy, empathy, shared understanding, and mutual responsiveness. Its presence sustains psychological security and enhances dyadic satisfaction, whereas its absence can contribute to relational distress and emotional disconnection. In contemporary psychology, researchers have increasingly sought to identify not only the direct antecedents of emotional connection but also the psychological vulnerabilities and self-perceptions that mediate such processes (Dehghanidowlatabadi et al., 2025; Finzi-Dottan et al., 2025). Among these, sexual self-esteem and interpersonal vulnerability have emerged as crucial yet underexplored constructs.

Sexual self-esteem refers to an individual's subjective evaluation of their worth and competence as a sexual being. It influences how people experience closeness, communicate desires, and express vulnerability in intimate contexts (Wehrli et



al., 2025). Individuals with high sexual self-esteem are more likely to feel confident in expressing needs and boundaries, fostering emotional reciprocity and reducing relational ambiguity (Wu & Zheng, 2021). Conversely, low sexual self-esteem has been linked to avoidance of emotional intimacy and maladaptive conflict resolution strategies (Chen et al., 2021; Espinosa-Hernández & Vasilenko, 2021). In longitudinal studies, sexual self-esteem has also shown predictive value in determining levels of dyadic empathy and emotional synchrony over time (Aghighi et al., 2021; Zarif et al., 2023).

Emerging empirical findings underscore the strong association between sexual self-esteem and a range of intrapersonal and relational factors, including body image, communication, and emotional expression. For instance, research has shown that self-esteem moderates the effect of body image on sexual functioning, with higher sexual self-esteem acting as a protective factor in maintaining intimacy and reducing anxiety during sexual activity (Wu & Zheng, 2021). In the context of women with chronic illnesses, sexual self-esteem has been found to mediate the link between marital quality and psychological adjustment (Damirchi et al., 2021). Similarly, sexual self-esteem contributes to marital adjustment and resilience in the face of relational stressors such as infertility and emotional neglect (Aghighi et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2022). These patterns affirm that sexual self-esteem functions not only as a static trait but as a dynamic regulator of emotional accessibility and relational engagement.

Yet, the translation of sexual self-esteem into sustained emotional connection is rarely linear. One potential mediating construct in this process is **interpersonal vulnerability**, which encompasses emotional openness, sensitivity to rejection, and the perceived risk of being emotionally hurt. Interpersonal vulnerability can be adaptive in creating space for authenticity and closeness, but it may also trigger self-protective mechanisms that limit emotional investment, particularly in those with unstable self-views (Koçak & Çağatay, 2024). The link between self-esteem and interpersonal vulnerability is well-documented in research on trauma and emotional development. For example, individuals exposed to adverse childhood experiences often report heightened emotional sensitivity and maladaptive interpersonal schemas, which are shaped through disruptions in self-worth and trust formation (Borhan, 2024; Xie et al., 2021).

From a theoretical standpoint, the interplay between sexual self-esteem and emotional connection through interpersonal vulnerability can be understood through the lens of attachment theory and socio-cognitive models of relational self-regulation. These models propose that internal representations of the self—especially in sexual and emotional domains—affect how individuals interpret relational cues and manage closeness and distance (Chen et al., 2021; Martín et al., 2021). For instance, those with high sexual self-esteem may perceive emotional closeness as rewarding and safe, while those with lower self-esteem may experience ambivalence, perceiving emotional intimacy as both desirable and threatening. Such internal conflict amplifies vulnerability, possibly leading to emotional withdrawal or superficial relational engagement (Gerymski & Szeląg, 2023).

The role of interpersonal vulnerability is particularly salient in collectivist cultural settings like Morocco, where social norms often dictate restrained emotional expression and idealized gender roles in intimate relationships. In these settings, expressing sexual needs or emotional fears may be perceived as socially inappropriate or even shameful, thereby amplifying internal conflicts and undermining emotional connection (Abdoli et al., 2024; Nikouyan, 2025). Prior research in similar cultural contexts has shown that self-disclosure, particularly in emotionally or sexually charged domains, is often constrained by expectations of modesty and emotional control, further complicating how sexual self-esteem translates into emotional intimacy (Saeed et al., 2024; Sujadi & Ahmad, 2023).

Importantly, studies have also emphasized the gendered dynamics of these constructs. Women, for instance, tend to experience higher interpersonal vulnerability when their self-esteem is low, which affects their willingness to engage emotionally (Gutierrez et al., 2024). In contrast, men with low sexual self-esteem may compensate through emotional disengagement or control-oriented behaviors, reinforcing relational distance (Bsharat, 2024). This gender-based discrepancy

in vulnerability expression has important implications for understanding the emotional architecture of relationships and for designing interventions to improve emotional bonding and sexual communication.

The psychological literature supports the argument that self-esteem—particularly sexual self-esteem—is not only a determinant of personal well-being but also a crucial mediator in how individuals form, maintain, and repair intimate connections. Meta-analytic reviews show that self-esteem predicts emotional resilience and cognitive empathy, two key ingredients of emotional connection (Saha & Sinha, 2024; Villegas, 2025). Similarly, dyadic studies indicate that the interrelation between emotional competencies and sexual self-perception plays a significant role in determining levels of shared emotional understanding and support (Torkaman et al., 2018; Wehrli et al., 2025).

Additionally, the development of instruments that assess dyadic sexual self-esteem and emotional connection has allowed for more precise measurement of these constructs. The Dyadic Sexual Self-Esteem Inventory, for instance, has shown strong psychometric properties and has been used to validate the association between positive sexual self-appraisal and emotional openness within couples (Wehrli et al., 2025). These advancements allow for a better understanding of the mechanisms linking intrapersonal factors to interpersonal outcomes.

Despite the growing body of literature, few studies have tested integrative models that examine both the direct and mediated effects of sexual self-esteem on emotional connection through interpersonal vulnerability. Previous findings tend to isolate these variables, failing to explore the pathways that link them in a dynamic and interdependent framework (Chen & Cheng, 2023). Furthermore, cultural moderators are often neglected, despite clear evidence that cultural expectations influence how self-esteem, vulnerability, and emotional expression unfold in intimate contexts (Koçak & Çağatay, 2024; Sujadi & Ahmad, 2023).

Therefore, this study aims to fill these gaps by exploring a structural model in which interpersonal vulnerability mediates the relationship between sexual self-esteem and emotional connection in romantic relationships among Moroccan adults.

## Methods and Materials

### Study Design and Participants

This study employed a descriptive correlational design to examine the predictive role of sexual self-esteem on emotional connection through the mediating effect of interpersonal vulnerability. The study population included married and cohabiting adults residing in urban areas of Morocco. Based on the Morgan and Krejcie sample size table (1970), a sample of 360 participants was determined to be sufficient to ensure representativeness and statistical power. Participants were selected through multi-stage cluster sampling from community centers and public health institutions in Rabat, Casablanca, and Marrakesh. Inclusion criteria included being in a committed romantic relationship for at least one year and age between 20 and 60 years. Participants provided informed consent, and anonymity and confidentiality were assured.

### Measures

To assess emotional connection between partners, the Emotional Intimacy Scale (EIS) developed by Sinclair and Dowdy (2005) was used. This scale comprises 6 items that measure the degree of emotional closeness, openness, and mutual understanding between romantic partners. Participants respond on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 6 (“strongly agree”), with higher scores indicating stronger emotional intimacy and connection. The EIS has demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .92$ ) and has been validated in both clinical and non-clinical samples, supporting its convergent validity through correlations with measures of relationship satisfaction and attachment security.

Sexual self-esteem was measured using the Sexual Self-Esteem Inventory for Women (SSEI-W) developed by Zeanah and Schwarz (1996). Although initially designed for women, the inventory has been adapted and used across diverse adult populations with appropriate gender modifications. The scale includes 81 items across five subscales: Skill and Experience, Attractiveness, Control, Moral Judgment, and Adaptiveness. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”), with higher scores indicating greater sexual self-esteem. The SSEI-W has shown strong psychometric properties, with reported Cronbach’s alpha coefficients ranging from .83 to .93 across subscales. Numerous studies have confirmed its content and construct validity in evaluating self-perceptions of sexuality in intimate contexts.

Interpersonal vulnerability was assessed using the Interpersonal Vulnerability Questionnaire (IVQ) developed by Phillips and colleagues (2014). This 20-item instrument evaluates individuals’ perceived susceptibility to emotional exposure, rejection, or criticism within close relationships. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (“not at all true of me”) to 5 (“very true of me”), and the total score reflects the degree of interpersonal emotional vulnerability, with higher scores denoting greater vulnerability. The IVQ includes three subscales: Fear of Exposure, Sensitivity to Rejection, and Need for Acceptance. Validation studies have supported its reliability (Cronbach’s alpha = .89) and construct validity, as it correlates significantly with attachment insecurity and measures of emotional dysregulation.

### Data analysis

Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were used to describe demographic variables and study constructs. Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between emotional connection, sexual self-esteem, and interpersonal vulnerability using SPSS version 27. To test the hypothesized mediating model, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed using AMOS version 21. Model fit indices, including Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), were used to evaluate the adequacy of the model. Statistical significance was set at  $p < .01$  for all inferential analyses.

### Findings and Results

Among the 360 participants, 198 (55.00%) were female and 162 (45.00%) were male. The mean age of participants was 34.67 years (SD = 8.54), ranging from 21 to 58 years. In terms of education, 28.33% ( $n = 102$ ) held a high school diploma, 41.94% ( $n = 151$ ) had a bachelor’s degree, and 29.72% ( $n = 107$ ) possessed a postgraduate degree. Regarding relationship duration, 96 participants (26.67%) reported 1–5 years, 123 (34.17%) reported 6–10 years, and 141 (39.17%) had been in their relationship for more than 10 years. The majority of participants (73.06%) identified as middle income, while 16.11% reported low income, and 10.83% high income.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N = 360)**

| Variable                    | Mean (M) | Standard Deviation (SD) |
|-----------------------------|----------|-------------------------|
| Sexual Self-Esteem          | 3.84     | 0.62                    |
| Interpersonal Vulnerability | 2.91     | 0.68                    |
| Emotional Connection        | 4.16     | 0.55                    |

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 1 indicate that participants reported a relatively high level of emotional connection ( $M = 4.16$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ), moderately high sexual self-esteem ( $M = 3.84$ ,  $SD = 0.62$ ), and moderate levels of interpersonal vulnerability ( $M = 2.91$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ). The distribution of responses suggests adequate variability in all measures for further analysis.

Prior to conducting the main analyses, all statistical assumptions were examined and satisfied. The assumption of normality was confirmed as skewness and kurtosis values for all variables ranged between -0.83 and +0.74, within the acceptable range of  $\pm 2$ . The linearity of relationships was visually verified using scatterplots, and multicollinearity was ruled out, with Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values ranging from 1.12 to 1.46, well below the cut-off of 5. Additionally, the Durbin-Watson statistic was 1.91, indicating no autocorrelation in the residuals. Homoscedasticity was verified by plotting standardized residuals against predicted values, showing a random distribution.

**Table 2. Pearson Correlation Coefficients Among Variables**

| Variable                       | 1       | 2       | 3 |
|--------------------------------|---------|---------|---|
| 1. Sexual Self-Esteem          | —       |         |   |
| 2. Interpersonal Vulnerability | -0.48** | —       |   |
| 3. Emotional Connection        | 0.52**  | -0.43** | — |

As shown in Table 2, sexual self-esteem was positively and significantly correlated with emotional connection ( $r = .52$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and negatively correlated with interpersonal vulnerability ( $r = -.48$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Additionally, interpersonal vulnerability showed a significant negative correlation with emotional connection ( $r = -.43$ ,  $p < .01$ ). These correlations provide initial support for the hypothesized mediation model.

**Table 3. Fit Indices for the Structural Equation Model**

| Fit Index               | Value  | Recommended Cutoff |
|-------------------------|--------|--------------------|
| Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ ) | 112.47 | —                  |
| Degrees of Freedom (df) | 58     | —                  |
| $\chi^2/df$             | 1.94   | $< 3.00$           |
| GFI                     | 0.95   | $\geq 0.90$        |
| AGFI                    | 0.91   | $\geq 0.90$        |
| CFI                     | 0.97   | $\geq 0.95$        |
| RMSEA                   | 0.051  | $< 0.08$           |
| TLI                     | 0.96   | $\geq 0.95$        |

The fit indices in Table 3 indicate that the hypothesized model provides an acceptable to good fit to the data. The  $\chi^2/df$  ratio was 1.94, well below the recommended threshold of 3.0. The GFI (0.95), AGFI (0.91), CFI (0.97), and TLI (0.96) all met or exceeded acceptable standards, and the RMSEA was within the acceptable range at 0.051, indicating minimal error of approximation.

**Table 4. Path Coefficients (Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects)**

| Path                                                             | B     | S.E  | $\beta$ | p        |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|------|---------|----------|
| Sexual Self-Esteem $\rightarrow$ Emotional Connection (Direct)   | 0.42  | 0.07 | 0.39    | $< .001$ |
| Sexual Self-Esteem $\rightarrow$ Interpersonal Vulnerability     | -0.53 | 0.06 | -0.48   | $< .001$ |
| Interpersonal Vulnerability $\rightarrow$ Emotional Connection   | -0.35 | 0.08 | -0.32   | $< .001$ |
| Sexual Self-Esteem $\rightarrow$ Emotional Connection (Indirect) | 0.19  | 0.04 | 0.15    | $< .001$ |
| Sexual Self-Esteem $\rightarrow$ Emotional Connection (Total)    | 0.61  | 0.06 | 0.54    | $< .001$ |

Table 4 presents the structural path coefficients. The direct effect of sexual self-esteem on emotional connection was significant ( $\beta = 0.39$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Additionally, sexual self-esteem had a strong negative effect on interpersonal vulnerability ( $\beta = -0.48$ ,  $p < .001$ ), which in turn negatively predicted emotional connection ( $\beta = -0.32$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The indirect path from sexual self-esteem to emotional connection through interpersonal vulnerability was also significant ( $\beta = 0.15$ ,  $p < .001$ ), confirming partial mediation. The total effect ( $\beta = 0.54$ ) underscores the importance of sexual self-esteem in predicting emotional closeness, both directly and through reduced interpersonal vulnerability.

Structural Model of Sexual Self-Esteem, Interpersonal Vulnerability, and Emotional Connection

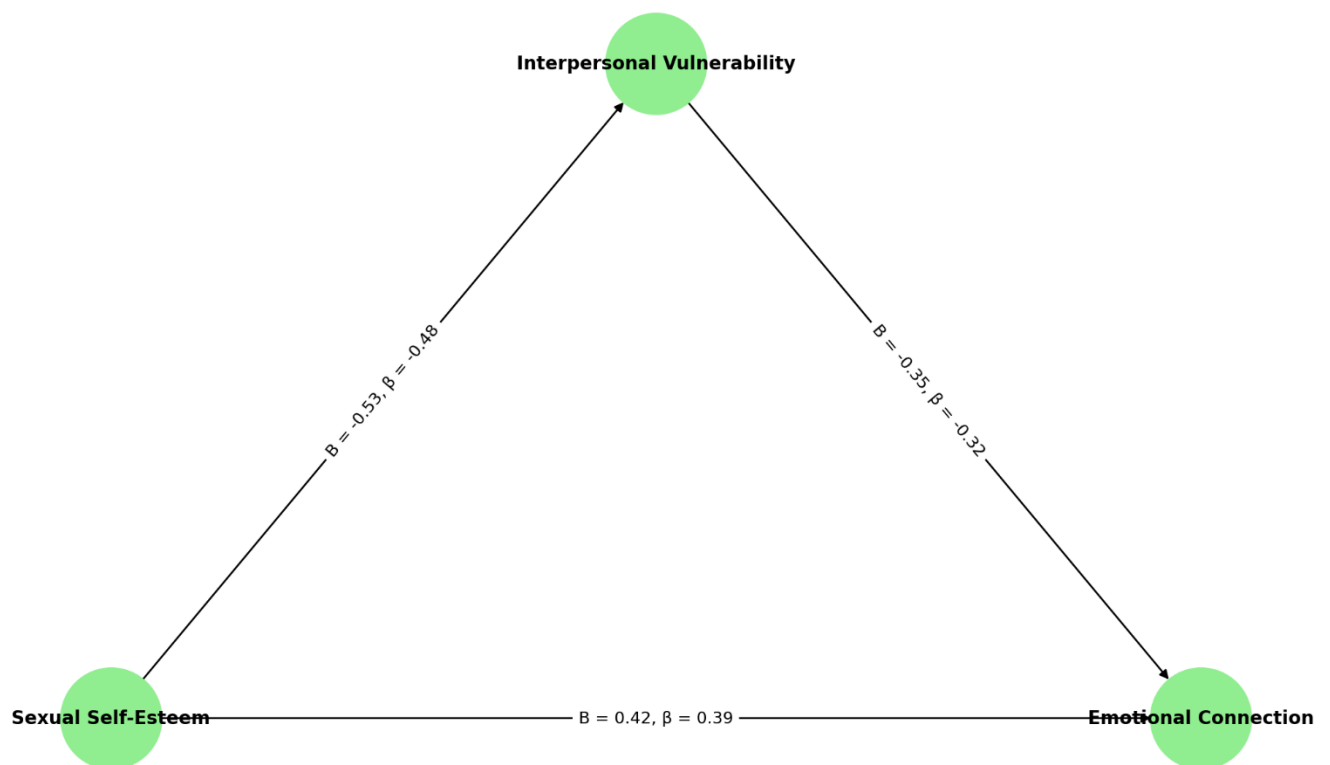


Figure 1. Model with Path Coefficients

## Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this study demonstrated that sexual self-esteem significantly predicts emotional connection in romantic relationships, and that this relationship is partially mediated by interpersonal vulnerability. Pearson correlation analyses indicated strong positive associations between sexual self-esteem and emotional connection, and a significant negative association between sexual self-esteem and interpersonal vulnerability. Structural equation modeling (SEM) further confirmed that individuals with higher levels of sexual self-esteem reported greater emotional closeness with their partners, and that this relationship was weakened when interpersonal vulnerability was elevated. These findings provide empirical support for the hypothesized model and align with existing research linking intrapersonal evaluations of sexuality to dyadic emotional functioning.

The direct path from sexual self-esteem to emotional connection was both statistically significant and practically meaningful. This result is consistent with prior studies showing that individuals with higher sexual self-esteem tend to report higher satisfaction in intimate communication, emotional responsiveness, and relational bonding (Wehrli et al., 2025; Wu & Zheng, 2021). As previous research highlights, sexual self-esteem fosters a sense of personal adequacy in intimate settings, which in turn promotes openness, empathy, and the capacity to co-regulate emotions within the relationship (Espinosa-Hernández & Vasilenko, 2021; Zarif et al., 2023). Similarly, studies with emerging adults and married women suggest that sexual self-worth is a stable predictor of emotional investment, as it reflects internalized narratives of desirability, competence, and comfort with vulnerability (Damirchi et al., 2021; Nikouyan, 2025).

The negative relationship between sexual self-esteem and interpersonal vulnerability supports the notion that individuals with lower sexual self-esteem are more prone to perceive emotional closeness as threatening. This aligns with findings from

both clinical and non-clinical populations, showing that deficits in sexual self-worth are associated with heightened sensitivity to rejection, emotional avoidance, and impaired relational trust (Gutierrez et al., 2024; Sujadi & Ahmad, 2023; Xie et al., 2021). Particularly in cultures that impose rigid norms around emotional control and sexual modesty, these dynamics become more pronounced, reinforcing internalized scripts that equate emotional exposure with weakness (Abdoli et al., 2024; Saeed et al., 2024). As such, individuals with diminished sexual self-esteem may internalize fears of abandonment or judgment when disclosing emotionally vulnerable content, thereby withdrawing or regulating affect in ways that hinder connection.

The mediating role of interpersonal vulnerability provides additional insight into how self-evaluations related to sexuality translate into dyadic emotional functioning. Our findings suggest that sexual self-esteem alone is not always sufficient for emotional closeness unless accompanied by a willingness to tolerate and express emotional vulnerability. This finding resonates with theories of emotional intimacy, which posit that connection arises not only from positive self-perceptions but also from one's capacity to engage in mutual disclosure and acceptance (Chen et al., 2021; Martín et al., 2021). In this regard, interpersonal vulnerability acts as a “gatekeeper” of emotional accessibility—it determines whether the confidence rooted in sexual self-esteem can be authentically expressed and reciprocated in emotional terms.

The current results are supported by literature emphasizing the centrality of vulnerability in intimate relationships. For example, Bsharat (2024) found that emotional intelligence and self-esteem together predict openness to emotional risk-taking in romantic dyads (Bsharat, 2024). Similarly, studies by Villegas (2025) and Koçak (2024) demonstrated that self-esteem significantly buffers the emotional costs of vulnerability, especially in individuals with a secure self-concept and emotional regulation capacity (Koçak & Çağatay, 2024; Villegas, 2025). The present findings suggest that when self-esteem is elevated but vulnerability is suppressed, individuals may engage in surface-level intimacy that lacks true emotional reciprocity, confirming that vulnerability is not merely a byproduct of relational closeness but a mechanism through which it is achieved.

The role of self-esteem as a foundational construct in emotional and sexual functioning was further supported by this study. It not only predicted reduced interpersonal vulnerability but also facilitated emotional depth and responsiveness. This is in agreement with research by Chen and Cheng (2023), who found that self-esteem mediates the association between emotional intelligence and creative self-efficacy, reinforcing the notion that self-worth serves as a bridge between emotional traits and interpersonal outcomes (Chen & Cheng, 2023). Moreover, similar patterns were observed by Saha and Sinha (2024), who reported that high self-esteem was positively associated with emotional regulation, which in turn predicted intimacy-promoting behaviors in young adults (Saha & Sinha, 2024). The alignment between these findings and our results suggests that self-esteem—especially when rooted in positive sexual identity—contributes to both the emotional and behavioral expressions of connection.

Another relevant interpretation pertains to gendered expression of vulnerability in relationships. Literature suggests that women tend to experience higher emotional permeability and are more likely to internalize deficits in sexual self-esteem as threats to relational security (Borhan, 2024; Gerymski & Szeląg, 2023). Men, conversely, may engage in more overt distancing behaviors, masking low self-esteem through dominance or emotional suppression. While the present study did not aim to explore gender differences, it is likely that the mediating role of interpersonal vulnerability may be moderated by gender norms in Moroccan culture. This is especially critical in contexts where emotional openness is traditionally stigmatized or linked to perceived weakness (Abdoli et al., 2024; Torkaman et al., 2018).

Interestingly, our findings also resonate with resilience-based frameworks. Several studies have shown that self-esteem enhances resilience by reducing emotional avoidance and promoting authentic relational engagement (Chen et al., 2022; Villegas, 2025). The capacity to endure emotional discomfort in the face of interpersonal risk is a hallmark of resilient relational behavior, which is made more possible when individuals possess a secure and affirmative view of their sexual self (Aghighi et

al., 2021; Espinosa-Hernández & Vasilenko, 2021). Our results suggest that interventions aimed at enhancing sexual self-esteem could indirectly reduce interpersonal fear and enhance dyadic attunement through the facilitation of vulnerability.

This study's use of structural equation modeling provided a robust test of the theoretical model, confirming both direct and indirect paths between the constructs. The significant partial mediation implies that interpersonal vulnerability is not the sole pathway through which sexual self-esteem impacts emotional connection, but it plays a pivotal role. Future studies could explore additional mediators, such as attachment style, communication patterns, or sexual satisfaction, all of which are known to intersect with self-esteem and emotional processes (Chen & Cheng, 2023; Wu et al., 2018).

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. First, the cross-sectional design prevents any causal conclusions regarding the directionality of the observed relationships. Longitudinal studies would be more appropriate to track changes in sexual self-esteem, vulnerability, and emotional connection over time. Second, the reliance on self-report measures may introduce bias due to social desirability or limited introspective accuracy, especially given the cultural sensitivities surrounding sexuality and emotional disclosure in Moroccan society. Third, the study sample was limited to urban populations, which may not represent the experiences of individuals in rural or more conservative regions of the country. Cultural norms around sexuality, gender roles, and emotional expression may vary considerably, and future research should strive to include a more demographically diverse population.

Future research could explore the role of additional psychological mediators or moderators in the relationship between sexual self-esteem and emotional connection, such as communication efficacy, sexual satisfaction, or relationship mindfulness. A comparative analysis between different age groups or cultural contexts would also be valuable, as the meaning and expression of vulnerability and self-esteem are often socially constructed. It would also be beneficial to explore dyadic data, gathering perspectives from both partners to better understand mutual emotional regulation processes and relational feedback loops. Moreover, incorporating physiological or behavioral measures of intimacy and vulnerability (e.g., eye contact, touch, heart rate variability during emotional disclosure) could complement self-report data and provide richer insights.

The findings of this study offer valuable implications for clinical and educational practices. Therapists working with couples should consider assessing and addressing sexual self-esteem as part of their interventions, particularly when emotional disconnect or communication breakdowns are present. Facilitating safe environments for clients to explore interpersonal vulnerability can enhance intimacy and resilience within the relationship. Relationship education programs may also benefit from incorporating content on healthy sexual self-concept development, particularly in cultures where such topics remain taboo. Empowering individuals to see vulnerability not as weakness but as a strength can shift relational dynamics toward greater emotional closeness and mutual understanding.

### **Declaration of Interest**

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

### **Ethical Considerations**

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

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### **Authors' Contributions**

All authors equally contributed to this study.

### Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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