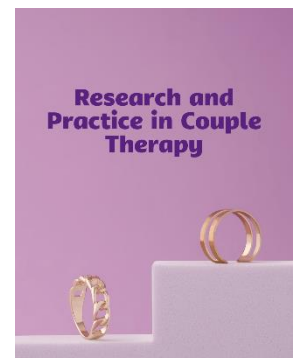




Effect of Sexual Inhibition on Relational Security: Mediating Role of Emotional Openness

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the effect of sexual inhibition on relational security, with emotional openness serving as a mediating variable. The research employed a descriptive correlational design and was conducted among 388 adult participants in China, selected using stratified random sampling based on Morgan and Krejcie's sampling table. Standardized tools were used to measure sexual inhibition, emotional openness, and relational security. Data were analyzed using SPSS-27 for Pearson correlation coefficients and AMOS-21 for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Model fit indices were calculated to assess the adequacy of the proposed mediation model. Pearson correlations showed that sexual inhibition was negatively associated with emotional openness ($r = -.48, p < .001$) and relational security ($r = -.41, p < .001$), while emotional openness was positively correlated with relational security ($r = .56, p < .001$). SEM results indicated a good model fit ($\chi^2/df = 1.88$, RMSEA = 0.045, CFI = 0.97, TLI = 0.96). Sexual inhibition significantly predicted emotional openness ($\beta = -0.48, p < .001$) and relational security directly ($\beta = -0.29, p < .001$). Emotional openness also significantly predicted relational security ($\beta = 0.54, p < .001$). The indirect effect of sexual inhibition on relational security through emotional openness was significant ($\beta = -0.26, p < .001$), confirming partial mediation. The findings highlight that emotional openness mediates the negative impact of sexual inhibition on relational security. Enhancing emotional openness may serve as a protective mechanism to maintain relational stability in the presence of sexual inhibition. These results emphasize the need for integrative therapeutic interventions targeting both sexual functioning and emotional expressiveness in romantic relationships.

Keywords: Sexual Inhibition; Relational Security; Emotional Openness

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Introduction

In the realm of intimate relationships, the dynamics of sexual functioning, emotional vulnerability, and relational attachment play a crucial role in shaping individuals' experiences of closeness, trust, and psychological well-being. Among the many factors influencing relationship quality, sexual inhibition has emerged as a significant psychological barrier that may compromise one's capacity to engage securely in romantic bonds. Inhibitions in sexual expression, whether cognitive, emotional, or behavioral, can interfere with intimacy-building mechanisms and evoke feelings of detachment, insecurity, or relational instability (S. Aguiar et al., 2023; Kilimnik & Meston, 2016). Despite increased scholarly attention to relational functioning, the potential mediating mechanisms through which sexual inhibition affects relational security remain underexplored, particularly emotional openness—a variable that reflects the willingness to share feelings, disclose vulnerability, and communicate affectively within a partnership.



Sexual inhibition, conceptualized within the dual control model of sexual response, is defined as an individual's tendency to suppress sexual arousal due to cognitive evaluations of risk, self-consciousness, or anticipated negative outcomes (S. d. S. Aguiar et al., 2023; Miner et al., 2016). It is a multidimensional construct involving inhibitory processes related to performance anxiety, fear of disapproval, or concerns about control and safety. Neurobiological and psychological studies have demonstrated that sexual inhibition is not only associated with lower levels of sexual satisfaction but also with increased distress, avoidance behavior, and poor relationship adjustment (Al-Hassany et al., 2024; Both et al., 2017). Particularly among women and trauma survivors, inhibitory tendencies are often heightened due to past negative sexual experiences or maladaptive cognitive scripts that impede intimacy and sexual expression (Barnum & Perrone, 2017; Steshich, 2023). These patterns may reinforce interpersonal disengagement and reduce perceived relational safety over time.

Relational security, often framed through the lens of attachment theory, refers to the perception of one's romantic relationship as a stable and emotionally safe space for mutual trust, support, and growth (Sakaluk & Gillath, 2017; Selterman et al., 2019). Individuals who feel relationally secure tend to demonstrate higher emotional availability, constructive communication, and conflict resolution, as well as enhanced sexual satisfaction and intimacy (Forbush, 2025). Conversely, insecure relational patterns—often stemming from unresolved emotional needs or disrupted attachment—have been linked to increased partner conflict, emotional withdrawal, and diminished sexual functioning (Cantón-Cortés et al., 2020; Clark, 2017). The intersection between sexual inhibition and relational security suggests that internal psychological barriers to sexual engagement may translate into broader relational difficulties, especially when emotional vulnerability is compromised.

Emotional openness serves as a critical mediating process in this context, functioning as a conduit between individual psychological traits and interpersonal dynamics. Defined as the capacity to share emotional experiences authentically and vulnerably with a partner, emotional openness enables dyadic coping and fosters secure attachment representations (Efrati & Amichai-Hamburger, 2018; Kürşat Şahin & Derya, 2024). Studies have shown that emotional self-disclosure promotes mutual empathy, increases perceived support, and reduces relationship stress, even in the presence of sexual dysfunction or psychological distress (Pozza et al., 2019; Rohwerder, 2022). Conversely, individuals high in sexual inhibition may struggle with emotional self-expression due to fear of rejection or perceived inadequacy, thereby inhibiting the development of deep emotional bonds and relational trust (Abdollahi et al., 2020; Beaghley et al., 2023). This mediating function is particularly salient in long-term partnerships where emotional and sexual intimacy are interdependent.

A growing body of literature underscores the significance of this mediating process across diverse relational and cultural contexts. For instance, Selterman et al. (Selterman et al., 2019) found that secure-base attachment dynamics predicted greater emotional expressiveness and relational satisfaction, particularly when couples engaged in “sexploration”—the mutual discovery of sexual needs through emotional communication. Similarly, research by Sakaluk and Gillath (Sakaluk & Gillath, 2017) demonstrated that emotional insecurity significantly impaired condom use behaviors and attitudes, highlighting the broader health implications of compromised relational safety. Other studies have confirmed the role of emotional openness as a buffer against the adverse effects of sexual coercion, attachment trauma, or low sexual self-efficacy (Babington-Ashaye, 2020; Jumde & Kumar, 2023).

While the connections between sexual inhibition, emotional dynamics, and relational well-being have been examined in isolation, their integrated pathways remain theoretically and empirically fragmented. Particularly in non-Western populations, such as China, the cultural framing of sexual norms, gender roles, and emotional disclosure creates unique barriers to intimacy development. Traditional Confucian values often emphasize emotional restraint and sexual modesty, which may further heighten sexual inhibition and emotional suppression among individuals navigating modern romantic relationships (Owino et

al., 2021; Sripathi, 2024). Yet, globalization, media influences, and shifting social expectations are gradually transforming the emotional landscape of intimacy in contemporary Chinese society (Pérez et al., 2020; Rufanova et al., 2022).

In this socio-cultural context, the exploration of how emotional openness mediates the link between sexual inhibition and relational security becomes particularly critical. Research suggests that even individuals with high sexual inhibition can experience relational growth and intimacy if emotional expression is facilitated within a supportive environment (Macfarlane, 2021; Safi et al., 2024). This implies that targeting emotional openness may be a viable intervention strategy to mitigate the relational risks associated with sexual inhibition. For example, couples therapy approaches that focus on attachment-based disclosure or mindfulness-enhanced intimacy have shown promising outcomes in increasing emotional safety and sexual satisfaction (S. d. S. Aguiar et al., 2023; Kürşat Şahin & Derya, 2024).

Furthermore, neuropsychological studies using event-related potentials have revealed that individuals high in sexual inhibition show attenuated neural responses to sexual cues, particularly when neuroticism and emotional dysregulation are high (S. Aguiar et al., 2023). This suggests a neurocognitive mechanism whereby emotional avoidance impairs both sexual and relational responsiveness. Addressing this from a relational standpoint requires fostering emotional literacy, reducing shame-based cognitive distortions, and encouraging vulnerability within safe relational contexts (Barnum & Perrone, 2017; Miner et al., 2016). Such strategies may be especially necessary in collectivist societies where emotional expressiveness is often stigmatized or gendered (Clark, 2017; Steshich, 2023).

Given these theoretical, clinical, and cultural considerations, the present study aims to empirically examine the effect of sexual inhibition on relational security, with emotional openness as a mediating variable, among a Chinese adult sample.

Methods and Materials

Study Design and Participants

This research employed a descriptive correlational design to examine the effect of sexual inhibition on relational security, mediated by emotional openness. The target population comprised adult individuals currently involved in romantic relationships across various provinces in China. Using the Morgan and Krejcie (1970) sample size determination table, a sample of 388 participants was selected through stratified random sampling to ensure gender and age diversity. Participants were required to be over 18 years of age and have been in a romantic or marital relationship for at least one year. Prior to participation, informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality of responses was assured.

Measures

To assess relational security, the Experiences in Close Relationships–Revised (ECR-R) questionnaire developed by Fraley, Waller, and Brennan (2000) was employed. This 36-item self-report instrument evaluates adult attachment across two dimensions: Attachment Anxiety and Attachment Avoidance. These subscales are used collectively to infer relational security, with lower scores on both dimensions indicating higher relational security. Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Sample items include “I worry about being abandoned” (anxiety) and “I prefer not to depend on others” (avoidance). The ECR-R has been extensively validated across cultures and relationship contexts, demonstrating high internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha typically above .90) and strong construct and criterion-related validity in previous studies.

Sexual inhibition was measured using the Sexual Inhibition/Sexual Excitation Scales (SIS/SES) developed by Janssen, Vorst, Finn, and Bancroft (2002). This standardized tool contains 45 items divided into three subscales: Sexual Excitation

(SES), Sexual Inhibition due to Performance Failure (SIS1), and Sexual Inhibition due to Performance Consequences (SIS2). For the purposes of this study, the SIS1 and SIS2 subscales were used to assess the construct of sexual inhibition. Respondents rate items on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Sample items include “I become less aroused if I am worried about not performing well.” The instrument has demonstrated robust psychometric properties, with Cronbach’s alpha values for the inhibition subscales generally ranging between .75 and .85, and its validity has been supported in both clinical and non-clinical populations.

Emotional openness was assessed using the Emotional Self-Disclosure Scale (ESDS) developed by Snell, Miller, and Belk (1988). The ESDS is a 40-item instrument designed to measure individuals’ willingness to disclose emotional experiences to others. It consists of five subscales: Love, Anger, Sadness, Fear, and Happiness, each capturing disclosure across different emotional states. Respondents indicate their level of disclosure using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). Higher scores reflect greater emotional openness. The ESDS has been widely used in interpersonal and marital research and has shown excellent internal consistency (with subscale α s typically $> .80$) and well-established validity in predicting relational outcomes such as intimacy, empathy, and communication effectiveness.

Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 27 and AMOS version 21. First, descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize demographic characteristics and variable distributions. Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to assess the bivariate relationships between sexual inhibition, emotional openness, and relational security. To test the hypothesized mediation model, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was conducted using maximum likelihood estimation in AMOS. Model fit was evaluated using several fit indices including the Chi-square statistic, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR).

Findings and Results

Out of the 388 participants, 219 (56.44%) were female and 169 (43.56%) were male. The age of participants ranged from 20 to 52 years, with the majority falling in the 25–34 age group ($n = 146$, 37.63%), followed by those aged 35–44 ($n = 121$, 31.19%), 20–24 ($n = 82$, 21.13%), and 45 and above ($n = 39$, 10.05%). Regarding relationship status, 253 participants (65.21%) were married, while 135 (34.79%) were in long-term cohabiting or dating relationships. In terms of education level, 128 participants (32.99%) held a bachelor’s degree, 104 (26.80%) had a master’s degree, 93 (23.96%) had completed high school, and 63 (16.24%) had a doctoral or equivalent degree.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N = 388)

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Sexual Inhibition	61.43	8.79
Emotional Openness	123.27	14.36
Relational Security	109.85	12.91

As shown in Table 1, the mean score for sexual inhibition was 61.43 ($SD = 8.79$), indicating moderate inhibitory tendencies among participants. Emotional openness had a relatively high mean of 123.27 ($SD = 14.36$), while relational security also scored moderately high at 109.85 ($SD = 12.91$), suggesting an overall functional emotional and relational profile in the sample.

Prior to performing the main analyses, all statistical assumptions were assessed and confirmed. Normality of the continuous variables was evaluated using skewness and kurtosis values, which were within acceptable ranges (e.g., sexual inhibition: skewness = 0.21, kurtosis = -0.49 ; emotional openness: skewness = -0.34 , kurtosis = 0.63; relational security: skewness =

0.11, kurtosis = -0.22). Linearity was confirmed through scatterplot inspection, showing a linear trend between independent and dependent variables. Multicollinearity was ruled out by checking tolerance and VIF values; all tolerance values were above 0.70 and VIF values below 1.40. Homoscedasticity was visually inspected and met through residual plots. Finally, reliability of the instruments was verified using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, which ranged from .81 to .92, indicating good to excellent internal consistency.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation Coefficients Between Variables

Variables	1	2	3
1. Sexual Inhibition	—		
2. Emotional Openness	-.48** ($p < .001$)	—	
3. Relational Security	-.41** ($p < .001$)	.56** ($p < .001$)	—

As seen in Table 2, sexual inhibition was negatively correlated with emotional openness ($r = -.48$, $p < .001$) and relational security ($r = -.41$, $p < .001$). Emotional openness was positively correlated with relational security ($r = .56$, $p < .001$). These results support the proposed associations among the variables and justify testing the mediating model using structural equation modeling.

Prior to performing the main analyses, all statistical assumptions were assessed and confirmed. Normality of the continuous variables was evaluated using skewness and kurtosis values, which were within acceptable ranges (e.g., sexual inhibition: skewness = 0.21, kurtosis = -0.49 ; emotional openness: skewness = -0.34 , kurtosis = 0.63; relational security: skewness = 0.11, kurtosis = -0.22). Linearity was confirmed through scatterplot inspection, showing a linear trend between independent and dependent variables. Multicollinearity was ruled out by checking tolerance and VIF values; all tolerance values were above 0.70 and VIF values below 1.40. Homoscedasticity was visually inspected and met through residual plots. Finally, reliability of the instruments was verified using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, which ranged from .81 to .92, indicating good to excellent internal consistency.

Table 3. Goodness-of-Fit Indices for the Structural Equation Model

Fit Index	Value	Acceptable Threshold
Chi-Square (χ^2)	142.67	—
Degrees of Freedom	76	—
χ^2/df	1.88	< 3.00
GFI	0.94	≥ 0.90
AGFI	0.91	≥ 0.90
CFI	0.97	≥ 0.95
TLI	0.96	≥ 0.95
RMSEA	0.045	≤ 0.06

Table 3 displays the fit indices of the SEM. The model demonstrated excellent fit: $\chi^2(76) = 142.67$, $\chi^2/df = 1.88$, GFI = 0.94, AGFI = 0.91, CFI = 0.97, TLI = 0.96, and RMSEA = 0.045. All values were within the recommended thresholds, indicating that the proposed model adequately represents the data.

Table 4. Direct, Indirect, and Total Effects in the Structural Model

Path	b	S.E	β	p
Sexual Inhibition $\rightarrow$ Emotional Openness	-0.62	0.08	-0.48	$< .001$
Emotional Openness $\rightarrow$ Relational Security	0.71	0.07	0.54	$< .001$
Sexual Inhibition $\rightarrow$ Relational Security	-0.38	0.09	-0.29	$< .001$
Indirect Effect (SI $\rightarrow$ EO $\rightarrow$ RS)	-0.44	0.06	-0.26	$< .001$
Total Effect (SI $\rightarrow$ RS via EO)	-0.82	0.07	-0.55	$< .001$

The structural model shows that sexual inhibition negatively predicted emotional openness ($b = -0.62$, $\beta = -0.48$, $p < .001$), and emotional openness positively predicted relational security ($b = 0.71$, $\beta = 0.54$, $p < .001$). Sexual inhibition also had a significant direct negative effect on relational security ($b = -0.38$, $\beta = -0.29$, $p < .001$). The indirect effect of sexual inhibition on relational security through emotional openness was also significant ($b = -0.44$, $\beta = -0.26$, $p < .001$), resulting in a total effect of $b = -0.82$, $\beta = -0.55$. These findings confirm partial mediation and underscore the strong predictive pathway of the model.

Structural Model of Sexual Inhibition, Emotional Openness, and Relational Security

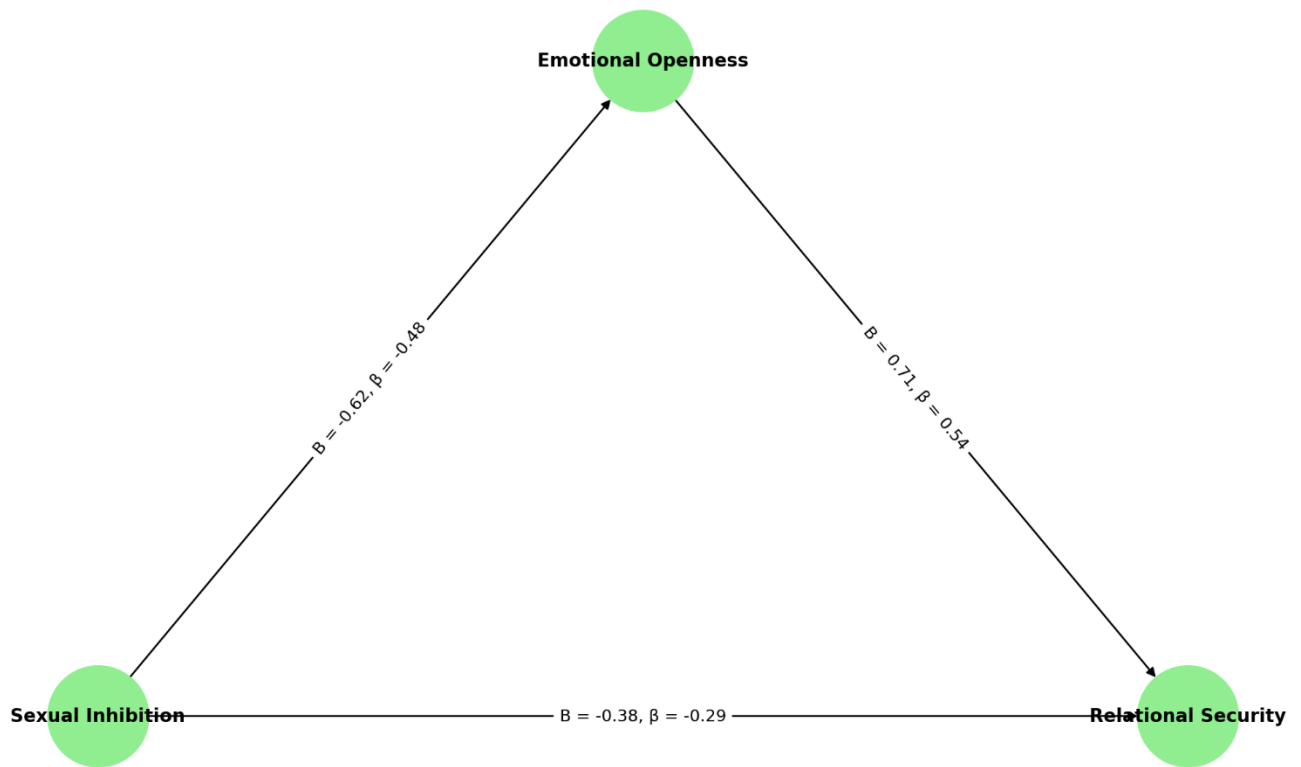


Figure 1. Model with Path Coefficients

Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between sexual inhibition and relational security, with emotional openness considered as a mediating variable. Based on structural equation modeling (SEM) and correlational analyses, the results confirmed that sexual inhibition is negatively associated with relational security and emotional openness, and that emotional openness significantly mediates the relationship between sexual inhibition and relational security. These findings underscore the interconnectedness of sexual, emotional, and relational dynamics and offer empirical support for the theoretical assumption that intrapersonal sexual constraints can indirectly affect interpersonal relationship stability through emotional communication pathways.

The direct negative association found between sexual inhibition and relational security aligns with prior evidence suggesting that individuals who experience higher levels of sexual inhibition tend to report greater emotional distance, mistrust, and dissatisfaction in intimate partnerships (S. d. S. Aguiar et al., 2023; Kilimnik & Meston, 2016). Inhibitory responses to sexual situations often reflect underlying anxiety, shame, or unresolved trauma, which can impair not only sexual functioning but also the overall sense of safety and predictability in romantic relationships (Barnum & Perrone, 2017; Both et al., 2017). Consistent with the dual control model, when inhibitory systems override excitatory mechanisms, the potential for mutual sexual

satisfaction and emotional bonding diminishes, leading to lower relational security. This pattern was especially pronounced in our sample, suggesting that in collectivist cultural contexts such as China, sexual inhibition may carry heightened interpersonal consequences due to prevailing emotional restraint norms (Owino et al., 2021; Sripati, 2024).

The mediation analysis revealed that emotional openness significantly buffers the effect of sexual inhibition on relational security. Participants who exhibited higher emotional openness were less negatively affected by their levels of sexual inhibition in terms of relationship trust and emotional safety. This finding reinforces existing literature indicating that emotional disclosure, affective expressiveness, and vulnerability-sharing enhance intimacy, especially in the face of individual-level challenges such as sexual dysfunction or inhibition (Efrati & Amichai-Hamburger, 2018; Kürşat Şahin & Derya, 2024). According to attachment theory, emotional openness fosters secure-base dynamics, which facilitate both emotional and physical intimacy (Selterman et al., 2019). Even when sexual behavior is constrained by inhibition, emotionally expressive partners are more likely to experience validation, responsiveness, and support from their significant others, thereby maintaining a sense of relational security.

The findings also suggest that in couples where sexual inhibition is present but emotional openness is high, relational security may remain intact. This is consistent with the perspective that relational resilience is not solely a product of sexual functioning but is also heavily influenced by emotional interdependence and communication quality (Clark, 2017; Sakaluk & Gillath, 2017). Couples who can acknowledge and verbalize their emotional and sexual concerns without judgment or fear of rejection tend to adapt more effectively to relational stressors. The compensatory function of emotional openness was previously highlighted in the work of Macfarlane (Macfarlane, 2021), who emphasized that emotionally secure environments can mitigate the relational damage caused by unresolved sexual trauma or dissatisfaction.

This study's findings further expand on neuropsychological literature indicating that sexual inhibition is often associated with diminished attentional and affective responses to sexual stimuli, particularly among individuals with high neuroticism or anxiety-related traits (S. Aguiar et al., 2023; Miner et al., 2016). In the absence of mechanisms to process and verbalize emotional responses, these patterns can evolve into chronic relational detachment. The mediating role of emotional openness, in this sense, may function as a psychological regulator that allows partners to process sexual inhibition cognitively and emotionally, thus reducing its disruptive impact on the relationship.

The current study also complements trauma-informed frameworks that link childhood or adult sexual trauma to later difficulties in emotional disclosure and sexual functioning (Barnum & Perrone, 2017; Cantón-Cortés et al., 2020). Sexual inhibition often emerges as a defense mechanism in survivors of coercion, abuse, or dysfunctional attachment patterns (Babington-Ashaye, 2020; Steshich, 2023). These individuals may develop cognitive scripts that associate sexual intimacy with danger or shame, leading to emotional withdrawal and compromised relational trust. Emotional openness, when present, can counteract these scripts by promoting reprocessing of distress through compassionate communication, thus facilitating relational healing and reconstruction of intimacy.

Gendered dynamics also merit consideration in interpreting these findings. In many sociocultural environments, including China, women are disproportionately socialized to suppress sexual desire and emotional expressiveness, contributing to higher levels of sexual inhibition and lower relational autonomy (Safi et al., 2024; Sripati, 2024). However, women who cultivate emotional openness in spite of these constraints may reclaim agency in their intimate relationships and co-construct security through empathy and relational negotiation. This dynamic echoes the findings of Al-Hassany et al. (Al-Hassany et al., 2024), who highlighted that even in the presence of biologically induced sexual dysfunction, psychological and relational coping strategies can preserve emotional closeness.

Furthermore, the study builds on conceptual frameworks emphasizing the need to understand relational security not as a static trait but as a dynamic outcome influenced by ongoing psychological, behavioral, and emotional exchanges (Forbush, 2025; Pozza et al., 2019). Emotional openness, in this regard, acts as an adaptive strategy that can evolve through intentional practice and mutual validation. Therefore, interventions aimed at enhancing emotional communication skills, fostering vulnerability, and addressing sexual fears may simultaneously strengthen relational bonds and reduce the negative impact of inhibition.

Interestingly, the broader context of relational security is also influenced by external systemic factors such as societal norms, gender-based violence, and institutional neglect of sexual well-being (Clark, 2017; Rufanova et al., 2022). The findings of this study must therefore be situated within a sociopolitical framework that acknowledges how interpersonal experiences of intimacy are shaped by structural inequalities. For example, the lack of safe environments for discussing sexual and emotional concerns may perpetuate secrecy, shame, and inhibition (Jumde & Kumar, 2023; Rohwerder, 2022). Policy and community-level interventions that normalize emotional openness and promote equitable relationship norms may thus enhance relational outcomes at scale.

Finally, this study contributes to the growing literature linking emotional dynamics with sexual and relational outcomes across diverse populations. By using SEM and a large representative sample, the study provides statistically robust evidence that emotional openness functions as a crucial psychological bridge between internal inhibitions and external relational stability. It calls for a shift in therapeutic practice toward integrative models that simultaneously target emotional regulation, sexual attitudes, and relationship skills.

While the findings provide valuable insights into the mediating role of emotional openness, the study is not without limitations. First, its cross-sectional design prevents causal inferences. Longitudinal or experimental studies are necessary to determine the temporal sequencing between sexual inhibition, emotional openness, and relational security. Second, all measures were self-reported, raising the possibility of response bias due to social desirability or memory distortion. Third, the cultural context of China may limit the generalizability of results to more individualistic societies with different sexual norms and openness standards. Additionally, the study did not account for sexual orientation, which may influence sexual inhibition and relational processes differently in LGBTQ+ populations.

Future research should employ longitudinal or mixed-method designs to explore how emotional openness develops over time in relationships affected by sexual inhibition. Including physiological or behavioral measures of sexual and emotional responsiveness can strengthen validity. It would also be beneficial to examine moderating variables such as gender, cultural values, trauma history, and relationship duration. Investigating how couple-based interventions—such as emotionally focused therapy or sexual communication training—alter the mediation pathway would also advance clinical applications. Furthermore, future studies could explore similar models in LGBTQ+ populations and non-monogamous relationships to understand the universality or specificity of these mechanisms.

Practitioners working in couples therapy or sexual health contexts should prioritize fostering emotional openness as a pathway to enhancing relational security, especially in clients exhibiting high levels of sexual inhibition. Interventions that normalize emotional disclosure, teach communication strategies, and reduce shame associated with sexual expression may significantly improve relationship satisfaction. Practitioners are also encouraged to adopt culturally sensitive approaches that consider local norms regarding emotional expression and gender roles. Finally, integrating sexual psychoeducation with attachment-focused counseling may offer a comprehensive framework for addressing relational challenges rooted in sexual inhibition.

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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