

Sexual Shame and Emotional Disconnection: The Mediating Role of Fear of Intimacy

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine the mediating role of fear of intimacy in the relationship between sexual shame and emotional disconnection in romantic relationships. A descriptive correlational design was employed involving 378 adult participants from Georgia, selected based on the Morgan and Krejcie sample size table. Participants completed standardized self-report questionnaires measuring sexual shame, fear of intimacy, and emotional disconnection. Data were analyzed using SPSS-27 for Pearson correlation and AMOS-24 for structural equation modeling (SEM). The assumptions of normality, linearity, and multicollinearity were checked and confirmed prior to inferential analysis. Pearson correlation analysis revealed that sexual shame was positively correlated with both fear of intimacy ($r = .63, p < .001$) and emotional disconnection ($r = .59, p < .001$), and that fear of intimacy was strongly correlated with emotional disconnection ($r = .68, p < .001$). The SEM analysis indicated an acceptable model fit ($\chi^2 = 186.73, df = 84, \chi^2/df = 2.22, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.056$). Path analysis showed that sexual shame had a significant direct effect on fear of intimacy ($\beta = 0.63, p < .001$) and emotional disconnection ($\beta = 0.28, p < .001$). Furthermore, fear of intimacy significantly predicted emotional disconnection ($\beta = 0.58, p < .001$) and partially mediated the relationship between sexual shame and emotional disconnection. The indirect effect was also significant ($\beta = 0.37, p < .001$), with the total effect of sexual shame on emotional disconnection estimated at $\beta = 0.65 (p < .001)$. The findings underscore the significant mediating role of fear of intimacy in the link between sexual shame and emotional disconnection, highlighting the importance of addressing intimacy-related fears in clinical interventions aimed at reducing emotional disengagement in relationships.

Keywords: Sexual shame; fear of intimacy; emotional disconnection.

How to cite this article:

Schneider, L., & Mchedlidze, N. (2024). Sexual Shame and Emotional Disconnection: The Mediating Role of Fear of Intimacy. *Research and Practice in Couple Therapy*, 2(1), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.61838/rpct.2.1.3>

Introduction

Intimacy represents a profound emotional closeness and mutual vulnerability that can foster deeper relationship satisfaction, yet for many individuals, this closeness is a source of fear and psychological discomfort. Fear of intimacy is increasingly recognized as a significant interpersonal barrier that not only impairs emotional bonding but also mediates the effects of psychological and relational vulnerabilities such as shame, rejection sensitivity, and emotional avoidance on relationship outcomes (Finzi-Dottan, 2023; Giovazolias & Paschalidi, 2022). Within the landscape of adult romantic relationships, emotional disconnection—a state characterized by emotional detachment, reduced empathy, and decreased mutual support—is emerging as a consequential outcome of such intimacy-related disturbances. Particularly, sexual shame appears to be a key antecedent in this dynamic, acting as a powerful internal inhibitor that compromises one's ability to fully engage in emotionally and sexually intimate relationships (Rahmatabadi et al., 2023; Shishefar et al., 2020).

Sexual shame, broadly defined as the internalization of negative beliefs and emotions about one's sexual self, is often rooted in developmental experiences of moral judgment, relational trauma, or societal condemnation (Sarhani & Homaei, 2023). It differs from sexual guilt in that shame targets the self rather than the behavior, leading individuals to see themselves as inherently flawed or undesirable (Manbeck et al., 2020). Such affective self-judgment is closely associated with relational withdrawal and reduced openness to intimacy, particularly when individuals anticipate rejection or perceive their sexuality as unworthy of acceptance (İyiaydin et al., 2023). These shame-based tendencies can contribute to the emergence of fear of intimacy—a defensive posture aimed at avoiding emotional exposure and potential rejection. Research shows that individuals high in sexual shame may enter romantic relationships with an underlying expectation of relational failure or rejection, fueling an avoidant pattern that culminates in emotional detachment (Martin et al., 2022).

Fear of intimacy has been conceptualized as a multi-dimensional construct involving cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components that reflect anxiety and discomfort when engaging in emotionally close relationships (Giovazolias & Paschalidi, 2022; Han & Ol, 2022). This fear may stem from early attachment disturbances, unresolved trauma, or negative relational schemas formed during formative years. Individuals with heightened fear of intimacy may demonstrate ambivalence, withdrawal, or emotional suppression in response to closeness, viewing intimacy as inherently threatening (Lyvers et al., 2021). Importantly, these behavioral patterns are not merely interpersonal strategies; they are deeply embedded affective responses shaped by a person's internal working models of self and others (Hamidikian et al., 2022). The fear of intimacy functions not only as a relational inhibitor but also as a mediator that channels the influence of antecedent psychological conditions—such as sexual shame or rejection sensitivity—into relational impairments such as emotional disconnection or dissatisfaction (Finzi-Dottan, 2023; Qazi et al., 2023).

The role of fear of intimacy as a mediator has received increasing empirical attention, particularly in the context of couples struggling with relational dissatisfaction, rejection anxiety, or emotional unavailability. For instance, research by Qazi et al. (Qazi et al., 2023) demonstrated that fear of intimacy significantly mediates the association between perceived partner rejection and marital dissatisfaction among married women. Similarly, Han and Ol (Han & Ol, 2022) found that adult attachment insecurity contributes to fear of intimacy through diminished self-differentiation and self-esteem, which in turn reduces relationship satisfaction. These findings point to a consistent pattern in which fear of intimacy operates as an intermediary process—linking personal vulnerabilities to relational breakdowns. Such mediating effects may also extend to other affective constructs, such as emotional disconnection, which reflects the experiential outcome of impaired relational intimacy and mutual engagement.

Emotional disconnection is marked by the absence of mutual attunement, emotional support, and relational responsiveness, often developing over time as a defense mechanism against perceived interpersonal threat (Martin et al., 2022). In many cases, it is not merely a relational outcome but a psychological reaction that arises in response to unresolved shame, guilt, or fear. In a dyadic context, emotional disconnection is predictive of reduced communication, conflict avoidance, and ultimately, relational dissolution (Sarhani & Homaei, 2023). Importantly, recent studies suggest that emotional disconnection can be conceptualized not only as an outcome of poor intimacy but also as a feedback mechanism that reinforces emotional distancing and avoidance (Manbeck et al., 2020). The recursive nature of this process suggests the presence of a complex system in which variables such as shame and intimacy fears interact to amplify each other and deteriorate relational functioning.

Among the significant correlates of fear of intimacy is rejection sensitivity—the disposition to anxiously expect, readily perceive, and overreact to rejection cues (Giovazolias & Paschalidi, 2022; İyiaydin et al., 2023). Rejection sensitivity is often linked to early adverse experiences, such as childhood trauma or neglect, which impair trust and secure attachment formation

(方, 2021). Individuals with heightened rejection sensitivity may perceive intimate relationships as unsafe, thereby intensifying their fear of emotional exposure and vulnerability. The fear of intimacy then becomes a psychological buffer that shields the individual from further rejection, but at the cost of emotional connection and relational authenticity (Ścigała, Fabris, Badenes-Ribera, Zdankiewicz-Ścigała, & Longobardi, 2021). Ścigała et al. (Ścigała, Fabris, Badenes-Ribera, Zdankiewicz-Ścigała, Hintertan, et al., 2021) further support this perspective by identifying fear of intimacy as a mediator between insecure adult attachment and self-differentiation, with implications for relational autonomy and intimacy regulation.

Another salient factor influencing the fear-intimacy dynamic is alexithymia—the difficulty in identifying and expressing emotions—which is significantly correlated with both emotional disconnection and intimacy fears (Lyvers et al., 2021). Alexithymic individuals may struggle to access or articulate internal states, making emotional reciprocity within intimate relationships difficult to establish. The lack of emotional clarity contributes to avoidant behaviors, reinforcing a cycle of emotional distance and isolation. In this context, fear of intimacy is not simply about anxiety toward the other, but a deep-seated uncertainty about one's own affective world, which complicates relational navigation and trust-building (Ścigała, Fabris, Badenes-Ribera, Zdankiewicz-Ścigała, & Longobardi, 2021).

From a psychological intervention perspective, addressing fear of intimacy and its antecedents has been a growing focus in therapeutic work with couples. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and positive psychology approaches have shown promise in reducing emotional avoidance and fostering meta-emotional awareness (Rahmatabadi et al., 2023). For example, Rahmatabadi et al. demonstrated the effectiveness of ACT in decreasing rumination and increasing emotional flexibility in anxious women. Such approaches may indirectly improve intimacy capacities by targeting the maladaptive emotional processes that underlie shame and avoidance. Similarly, interventions that enhance self-differentiation and emotional regulation—such as those focusing on guilt resolution—may reduce the internal barriers that maintain intimacy fears (Hamidikian et al., 2021).

In populations facing fertility challenges, such as infertile men, fear of intimacy has also been shown to mediate the effects of stressors on cognitive and emotional functioning (Hassan et al., 2023). The internalization of infertility-related stigma often amplifies shame and emotional vulnerability, which in turn promotes intimacy avoidance as a coping strategy. These dynamics suggest that fear of intimacy is a cross-contextual construct that plays a central role in various manifestations of relational dysfunction, regardless of demographic or clinical variations. In light of this, understanding the pathways through which sexual shame influences emotional disconnection—via fear of intimacy—can inform more nuanced and effective therapeutic strategies (Hassan et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2022).

Given the substantial empirical support and theoretical relevance of this model, the present study aims to investigate the mediating role of fear of intimacy in the relationship between sexual shame and emotional disconnection. By employing a structural equation modeling approach, this study seeks to elucidate the underlying mechanisms through which internalized affective vulnerabilities disrupt relational functioning.

Methods and Materials

Study Design and Participants

This study employed a descriptive correlational design to investigate the relationships among sexual shame, fear of intimacy, and emotional disconnection in adults. A total of 378 participants were recruited from the general adult population in Georgia, based on the sample size guidelines provided by the Morgan and Krejcie (1970) table for a large population. Participants were selected using convenience sampling through online platforms and community outreach. Eligibility criteria included being over

the age of 18, having been in an intimate relationship for at least six months, and providing informed consent. The study was approved by the appropriate ethics committee, and data were collected anonymously.

Measures

To assess emotional disconnection, the Emotional Disengagement Subscale from the Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI; Funk & Rogge, 2007) was utilized. This subscale captures the extent to which individuals feel emotionally detached from their partner and is frequently used in dyadic and relational research. The CSI includes several subscales, with the Emotional Disengagement component typically consisting of 5 to 7 items focusing on withdrawal, lack of emotional sharing, and perceived emotional distance. Items are rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 7 (completely true), with higher scores indicating greater emotional disconnection. Previous studies have confirmed the subscale's high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha values typically above .85) and convergent validity with other measures of relational dissatisfaction and emotional avoidance.

Sexual shame was measured using the Sexual Shame Inventory (SSI) developed by Andrews, Chen, and Doan in 2015. This 18-item self-report scale assesses negative self-evaluations related to one's sexuality, including feelings of defectiveness, worthlessness, and internalized sexual stigma. The SSI includes two subscales: Internalized Sexual Shame and Behavioral Shame Avoidance, each comprising 9 items. Respondents rate items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), with higher total scores reflecting more intense experiences of sexual shame. Research has demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with internal consistency coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) exceeding .90 and evidence of both construct and criterion-related validity across diverse populations.

Fear of intimacy was assessed using the Fear of Intimacy Scale (FIS) developed by Descutner and Thelen in 1991. This instrument consists of 35 items designed to evaluate the extent to which individuals experience anxiety, discomfort, or avoidance when forming emotionally close relationships. The FIS is unidimensional and focuses primarily on emotional intimacy rather than physical closeness. Participants respond to items using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all characteristic of me) to 5 (extremely characteristic of me), with higher scores indicating greater fear of intimacy. The scale has shown excellent internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha > .90) and robust validity, having been widely used in both clinical and non-clinical samples.

Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted in two main phases. First, Pearson correlation analysis was used to explore the bivariate relationships between the dependent variable (emotional disconnection) and the two independent variables (sexual shame and fear of intimacy) using SPSS version 27. Second, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was performed using AMOS version 24 to assess the mediating role of fear of intimacy in the relationship between sexual shame and emotional disconnection. The SEM analysis included path coefficient estimation, model fit evaluation based on standard indices (e.g., CFI, TLI, RMSEA), and bootstrapping to test the significance of the indirect effect.

Findings and Results

The final sample included 378 participants, of whom 241 (63.7%) identified as female, 133 (35.2%) as male, and 4 (1.1%) as non-binary or preferred not to disclose. The participants' ages ranged from 19 to 54 years, with a mean age of 32.48 years (SD = 7.62). In terms of relationship status, 162 individuals (42.9%) reported being married, 118 (31.2%) were in long-term committed relationships, and 98 (25.9%) were cohabiting without formal commitment. Regarding education, 49 participants

(13.0%) had completed high school, 172 (45.5%) held a bachelor's degree, and 157 (41.5%) had obtained a graduate degree or higher.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N = 378)

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Sexual Shame	58.74	10.36
Fear of Intimacy	88.23	13.41
Emotional Disconnection	31.67	6.58

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the main study variables. The mean score for sexual shame was 58.74 (SD = 10.36), indicating a moderate level of internalized sexual negativity among participants. The mean score for fear of intimacy was 88.23 (SD = 13.41), suggesting moderately high emotional avoidance within relationships. Emotional disconnection showed a mean score of 31.67 (SD = 6.58), which reflects a noticeable level of emotional distancing in intimate partnerships among the sample.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation Coefficients Between Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3
1. Sexual Shame	—		
2. Fear of Intimacy	.63** (p < .001)	—	
3. Emotional Disconnection	.59** (p < .001)	.68** (p < .001)	—

Prior to conducting the main analyses, all statistical assumptions were tested and met. Normality was assessed through skewness and kurtosis values, which fell within the acceptable range of ± 1.5 for all variables (e.g., sexual shame: skewness = 0.47, kurtosis = 0.91; fear of intimacy: skewness = 0.39, kurtosis = 1.03). Linearity was verified through scatterplots, which revealed linear patterns between predictor and outcome variables. Multicollinearity diagnostics indicated acceptable tolerance values (sexual shame = 0.72; fear of intimacy = 0.75) and VIF values below 2.0. Additionally, Mahalanobis distance identified no significant multivariate outliers at $p < .001$. These results confirmed that the data met the assumptions for both Pearson correlation and SEM.

Table 2 reports the Pearson correlation coefficients between the main constructs. Sexual shame was strongly and positively correlated with fear of intimacy ($r = .63, p < .001$) and emotional disconnection ($r = .59, p < .001$). Likewise, fear of intimacy demonstrated a robust positive correlation with emotional disconnection ($r = .68, p < .001$). These results support the hypothesized associations among the variables and suggest that higher levels of shame and fear are linked to greater relational disengagement.

Table 3. Model Fit Indices for the Structural Equation Model

Fit Index	Value	Recommended Cut-off
Chi-Square (χ^2)	186.73	—
Degrees of Freedom (df)	84	—
χ^2/df	2.22	< 3.00
GFI	0.94	≥ 0.90
AGFI	0.91	≥ 0.90
CFI	0.96	≥ 0.95
TLI	0.95	≥ 0.95
RMSEA	0.056	≤ 0.06

As shown in Table 3, the structural equation model demonstrated an acceptable to excellent fit with the data. The chi-square value was 186.73 with 84 degrees of freedom ($\chi^2/df = 2.22$), which is within the acceptable range. Other indices also confirmed

good model fit: GFI = 0.94, AGFI = 0.91, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95, and RMSEA = 0.056. These indices indicate that the proposed model adequately represents the observed relationships among sexual shame, fear of intimacy, and emotional disconnection.

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

Path	B	SE	β	p
Sexual Shame → Fear of Intimacy	0.61	0.07	0.63	<.001
Fear of Intimacy → Emotional Disconnection	0.52	0.06	0.58	<.001
Sexual Shame → Emotional Disconnection (Direct)	0.21	0.05	0.28	<.001
Sexual Shame → Emotional Disconnection (Indirect via Fear of Intimacy)	0.32	0.04	0.37	<.001
Sexual Shame → Emotional Disconnection (Total Effect)	0.53	0.06	0.65	<.001

Table 4 details the direct, indirect, and total effects in the hypothesized mediation model. Sexual shame significantly predicted fear of intimacy ($\beta = 0.63$, $p < .001$), which in turn significantly predicted emotional disconnection ($\beta = 0.58$, $p < .001$). The direct path from sexual shame to emotional disconnection remained significant ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < .001$), indicating partial mediation. The indirect effect of sexual shame on emotional disconnection through fear of intimacy was also significant ($\beta = 0.37$, $p < .001$). The total effect of sexual shame on emotional disconnection ($\beta = 0.65$, $p < .001$) highlights the central role of both direct and mediated pathways in predicting emotional disengagement.

Structural Model with Standardized Path Coefficients

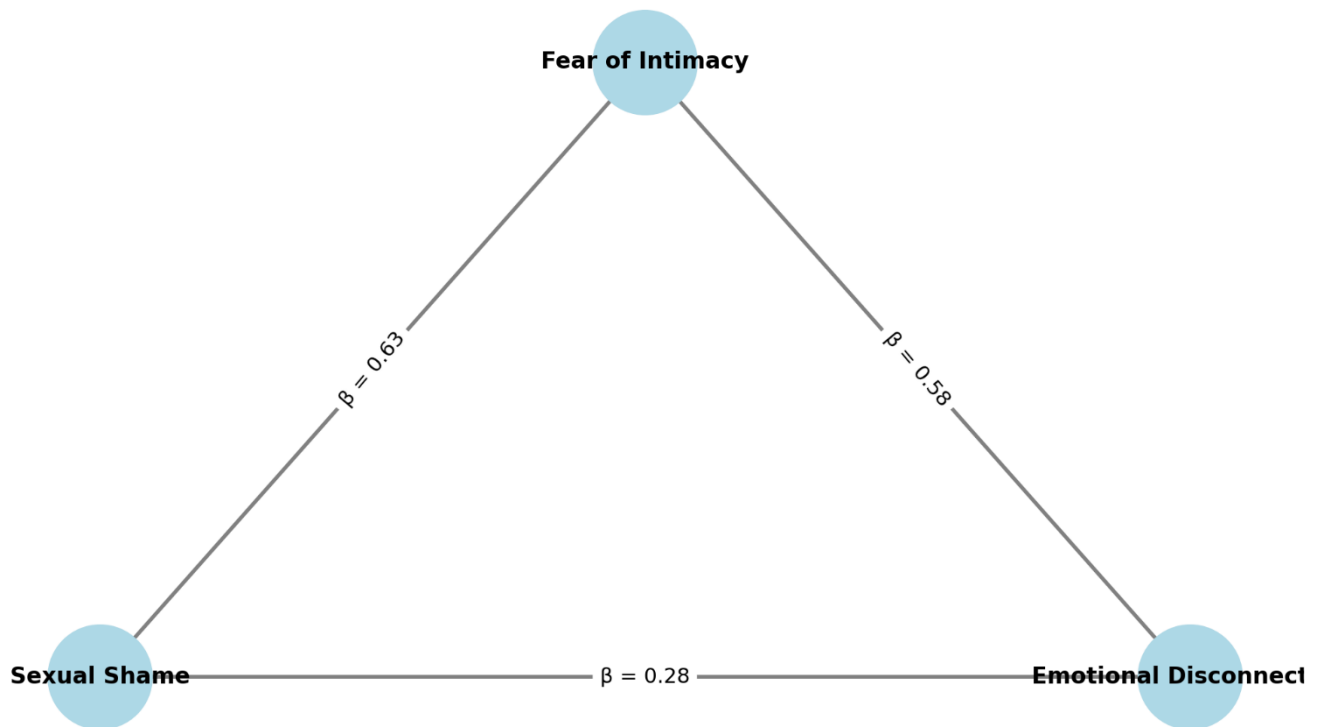


Figure 1. Final Model with Standardized Coefficients

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the present study revealed significant associations among sexual shame, fear of intimacy, and emotional disconnection. Specifically, sexual shame was positively correlated with both fear of intimacy and emotional disconnection, while fear of intimacy itself was positively associated with emotional disconnection. Furthermore, structural equation modeling confirmed that fear of intimacy significantly mediated the relationship between sexual shame and emotional disconnection,

indicating that individuals with high levels of sexual shame tend to experience greater fear of intimacy, which subsequently leads to higher levels of emotional disconnection in romantic relationships.

These results are consistent with existing theoretical frameworks and empirical studies that position fear of intimacy as a psychological mechanism linking internal affective vulnerabilities, such as shame, to interpersonal withdrawal and relational dissatisfaction. As previously noted by Finzi-Dottan (Finzi-Dottan, 2023), fear of intimacy is not merely a trait-based discomfort with closeness but operates as a mediator that channels the impact of self-differentiation and emotional regulation capacities into marital satisfaction. In the context of sexual shame, which involves deep-rooted feelings of personal defectiveness and unworthiness, this fear becomes particularly salient. Shishefar et al. (Shishefar et al., 2020) similarly demonstrated that fear of intimacy mediated the relationship between insecure attachment styles and subjective emotional pain, supporting the mediational role of this construct across affective and relational outcomes.

The direct effect of sexual shame on emotional disconnection underscores the powerful role of internalized sexual negativity in shaping relational dynamics. Individuals who perceive their sexual self as flawed or unacceptable often adopt defensive strategies to protect themselves from exposure and judgment. This aligns with the findings of İyiyaydn et al. (İyiyaydn et al., 2023), who identified rejection by intimate others as a predictor of fear-based relational behaviors. These strategies, while temporarily protective, often come at the cost of emotional reciprocity and closeness. The resulting emotional disconnection is not only a function of behavioral avoidance but also a manifestation of underlying beliefs about one's relational and sexual unworthiness (Martin et al., 2022).

Fear of intimacy as a mediator adds an important layer of understanding to these dynamics. It suggests that individuals do not immediately withdraw from connection due to shame alone; rather, they experience an intermediary phase of heightened emotional threat appraisal, which then informs their behavioral disengagement. This is consistent with the work of Giovazolias and Paschalidi (Giovazolias & Paschalidi, 2022), who found that rejection sensitivity leads to fear of intimacy, which in turn reduces relational openness in emerging adults. Similarly, Qazi et al. (Qazi et al., 2023) showed that the fear of intimacy mediated the negative effects of partner rejection on marital satisfaction, highlighting how fear-driven avoidance disrupts intimacy and satisfaction.

Moreover, the results corroborate Han and Ol's (Han & Ol, 2022) findings that adult attachment insecurity leads to fear of intimacy through diminished self-esteem and differentiation. In this study, shame—while conceptually distinct from attachment insecurity—serves a similar role in undermining self-concept and activating fear-based responses to closeness. The affective load carried by shame is internalized early, often reinforced by interpersonal rejection or sexual trauma, and later expressed in the form of intimacy aversion (Hamidikian et al., 2022). This developmental trajectory of shame-fear-disconnection provides a nuanced view of how early affective experiences manifest in adult romantic dysfunction.

The present study also adds to the growing body of research linking alexithymia and fear of intimacy. Lyvers et al. (Lyvers et al., 2021) found that individuals with alexithymia—a trait involving difficulty in identifying and articulating emotions—report greater fear of intimacy and lower relationship satisfaction. The inability to express or process emotional states is functionally similar to the self-concealment typical of sexual shame. Both conditions limit emotional expression, enhance relational ambiguity, and impair trust-building. Ścigala et al. (Ścigala, Fabris, Badenes-Ribera, Zdankiewicz-Ścigala, & Longobardi, 2021) elaborated further by showing that fear of intimacy mediates the relationship between alexithymia and adult attachment, a model that parallels the current study's focus on shame as the antecedent.

Interestingly, the findings support the broader view that fear of intimacy functions as a transdiagnostic process across multiple relational and psychological domains. Hassan et al. (Hassan et al., 2023), in their study of infertile men, found that

fear of intimacy mediated the relationship between infertility-related stress and neuropsychological functioning. This emphasizes the generalizability of fear of intimacy as a psychological bridge between personal vulnerabilities and relational or cognitive impairments. In our study, sexual shame operates as a domain-specific vulnerability, but the mechanism of avoidance through fear remains consistent with these broader applications.

In terms of intervention implications, the findings suggest that addressing fear of intimacy directly may interrupt the pathway from sexual shame to emotional disconnection. Therapeutic models such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and schema therapy, which target maladaptive shame scripts and promote emotional flexibility, could be particularly beneficial (Rahmatabadi et al., 2023). Rahmatabadi et al. demonstrated that ACT-based interventions reduce rumination and enhance emotional meta-awareness, thereby creating conditions that are more conducive to intimacy. Similarly, enhancing self-differentiation and guilt resolution, as shown by Hamidikian et al. (Hamidikian et al., 2021), can reduce the psychological barriers that fuel intimacy fears and relational disengagement.

Lastly, cultural and social factors should not be ignored in interpreting the results. As Wang et al. (Wang et al., 2022) demonstrated in their study of Chinese college students, emotional ambivalence in romantic relationships can significantly affect well-being, often mediated by emotional expression styles. In cultures where sexuality is taboo or heavily moralized, sexual shame is more likely to be internalized, exacerbating fear of intimacy and relational withdrawal. Similarly, 方 (方, 2021) emphasized the role of childhood trauma and rejection sensitivity in developing long-term intimacy fears, reinforcing the need to consider sociocultural contexts in both research and clinical practice.

This study is not without limitations. First, the use of self-report measures may introduce social desirability bias, particularly when assessing sensitive constructs such as sexual shame and fear of intimacy. Participants may have underreported or distorted their responses, especially given the cultural sensitivities surrounding sexual issues. Second, the study's cross-sectional design prevents any definitive conclusions about causality. Although the hypothesized model is theoretically and statistically supported, longitudinal or experimental designs are needed to confirm directional influences. Third, while the sample size was adequate, the use of convenience sampling and the restriction to participants from Georgia may limit the generalizability of the findings to other cultural or demographic populations. Finally, the study did not control for relationship duration, mental health status, or trauma history, all of which could influence the variables examined.

Future studies should seek to replicate these findings using more diverse and representative samples across cultural contexts. Longitudinal research could offer insight into how sexual shame and fear of intimacy evolve over time and influence the development of emotional disconnection in long-term relationships. Additionally, it would be valuable to investigate gender differences in the experience and expression of these constructs, as prior research suggests that men and women may process and internalize shame differently. Future models could also include additional mediators and moderators such as self-compassion, trauma exposure, or emotion regulation strategies to better understand the complexity of intimacy-related disruptions.

Clinicians working with individuals or couples facing intimacy difficulties should consider assessing underlying shame and its relational manifestations. Interventions aimed at increasing emotional literacy, challenging shame-based cognitive distortions, and fostering secure attachment patterns may help reduce fear of intimacy and promote relational closeness. Couple therapy models that incorporate both individual and dyadic work on emotional vulnerability may be especially effective. Educational programs that normalize discussions around sexuality and emotional openness can also serve as preventive tools, equipping individuals with the emotional skills needed for healthy, connected relationships.

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.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our gratitude to all those who helped us carrying out this study.

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.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

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