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Attachment, Power/Influence, Conflict Management Strategies, and Sexual Aggression in Emerging Adult Romantic Relationships

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ABSTRACT

Sexual aggression among young people is a public health concern. Although many episodes take place in a couple's relationship, few studies have explored the importance of relational variables in this interpersonal context. Of special interest may be the variables in a couple's functioning related to connectedness, power/influence, and conflict management. This dyadic longitudinal study aimed to examine the relationship between relational variables and sexual aggression in emerging adult romantic relationships. The sample consisted of 133 young heterosexual Spanish couples (mean age = 19.44; SD = 1.41) who completed an online questionnaire. At time 1 (T1), romantic attachment, partner's attempt to influence, perception of actual partner influence, conflict management strategies, and sexual aggression (perpetration and victimization) were assessed; 9 months later (T2), sexual aggression was assessed again. The data were analyzed following the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM). Males reported higher levels of perpetration than females, and females reported more victimization. Attachment-related anxiety predicted perpetration and victimization in both males and females (T1). In addition, males reported more perpetration when they perceived their partners as attempting to gain power in the relationship (T1) or having more actual influence in the romantic relationship (T2); whereas in females, victimization was more likely when they perceived more partner influence (T1 and T2), and their partners reported more female attempts at influence (T2). Negative conflict management strategies also explained male perpetration (T1 and T2) and female victimization (T1 and T2). These findings suggest the need to develop interventions aimed at promoting equity and relationship skills for emerging adults.

1 | Introduction

Sexual aggression may be defined as "behavior carried out with the intent or result of making another person engage in sexual activity despite his or her unwillingness to do so" (Krahé et al. 2015, p. 683). Thus, when a sexual act is attempted or consummated without the freely given consent of the other person or against the will of someone unable to consent or refuse, it is considered sexual aggression, regardless of the strategies used and/or the specific sexual act (Stefansen et al. 2021).

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Summary

- To prevent sexual violence, emerging adults should be trained to better negotiate and manage partner interdependence.
- Promoting secure attachment-based relationships could also be a beneficial strategy to improve well-being in these relationships.
- It is equally necessary to work with emerging adults on the importance of using positive conflict management strategies in their couple conflicts, avoiding negative ones.

Sexual aggression is a worldwide problem, with an important incidence among adolescents and emerging adults; in addition, it has significant and long-lasting negative consequences for the health and well-being of the victims, such as anxiety, depression, physical injury, or relational difficulties (Collibee and Furman 2014; Stefansen et al. 2021). Sexual aggression is not only a heterogeneous phenomenon in its impact on victims, but also in its manifestations: sexual aggression can include various types of coercive strategies, such as the threat of physical force, emotional manipulation or alcohol and/or drug incapacitation, and different sexual acts (e.g., kissing, fondling, masturbation, and oral sex) (Jeffrey and Barata 2021; Stefansen et al. 2021).

The line of research on this topic has grown considerably in recent years, and the results have helped to refute many stereotypes and misconceptions about the subject. For example, many people believe that sexual aggression is often committed by individuals who are unknown to the victim. However, most acts of sexual aggression are perpetrated by people with whom victims have a close relationship or when such a relationship has been maintained, such as a close friend, classmate, neighbor, or partner (Fernández-Fuertes et al. 2020; Krahé et al. 2015).

Data on the prevalence of sexual aggression in heterosexual couples among adolescents and emerging adults are, as in other populations, highly variable. This variability is most likely the result of a combination of multiple factors. More specifically, data can be affected by how aggression is conceptualized and measured, how data were collected, or the specific characteristics of the samples (e.g., age, the victim/perpetrator relationship). For example, according to the systematic review carried out by Rubio-Garay et al. (2017), sexual aggression perpetration ranged from 4.5% to 58.8% for males and from 1.2% to 40.1% for females. Regarding victimization, the rates of sexual aggression ranged from 0.1% to 54.2% for males and from 1.2% to 64.6% for females.

The study carried out by Krahé et al. (2015) was pioneering, as it utilized the same methodological approach to analyze sexual aggression among young people in 10 European countries, finding differences in prevalence between countries. When considering the data from all countries, the highest prevalence of sexual aggression was found within the context of a romantic relationship with a current partner or ex-partner: 12.2% of males and 4.6% of females indicated that they had perpetrated a sexually coercive act toward their partner or ex-partner on at least one occasion, while 23.6% of males and 20.3% of females reported having experienced one or more episodes of sexual aggression by their current partner or ex-partner.

Although studies show that romantic relationships are among the contexts most prone to sexual aggression, research aimed at the identification of possible risk factors associated with the perpetration and/or the victimization of sexual aggression is scarce when couples are used as the unit of analysis (Fernández-Fuertes et al. 2020; Vicario-Molina et al. 2015). The Dynamic Developmental Systems (DDS) model offers an interesting perspective with respect to understanding possible risk factors in the context of romantic relationships. The DDS model raises the importance of considering the contextual and demographic characteristics of partners, but also the personal characteristics and behaviors of both members of the couple and the couple's relationship and interaction patterns (Capaldi et al. 2012, 2019).

Research has been conducted on risk factors at the individual level, especially for predicting male perpetration and female vulnerability to victimization; it has been observed that males can also be victims and females can be perpetrators of sexual aggression, although male perpetration is more common as is female victimization (Fernández-Fuertes et al. 2020; Jeffrey and Barata 2021; Krahé et al. 2015). Moreover, some studies have found that the predictors of perpetration and victimization for males and females may not be the same (Fernández-Fuertes et al. 2018; Schatzel-Murphy et al. 2009).

There is also a need to conduct more longitudinal studies with couples that result in dyadic data (Couture et al. 2024), as most studies have examined this issue using individuals who only report the aggressions perpetrated and/or suffered by themselves in cross-sectional studies (Capaldi et al. 2012, 2019; Hines et al. 2020; Vicario-Molina et al. 2015). While these previous works are useful, they do not indicate that the partner's outcome is affected as much by his or her own characteristics as by those of the other partner. To overcome the limitations of previous works, a dyadic longitudinal analysis has been conducted in the present study.

In addition to individual risk factors, it seems particularly important to investigate the role of the relational dynamics, as posited by the DDS perspective. Attachment, power/influence, and conflict management strategies are central elements in the development and functioning of couple relationships (Bonache et al. 2019; Capaldi et al. 2019; Courtain and Glowacz 2019; Hines et al. 2020), and therefore may also be relevant in understanding and preventing sexual aggression in youth romantic relationships, as will be discussed below.

1.1 | Attachment

Attachment theory posits that individuals develop their own internal working models of intimate relationship functioning from early interactions with their caregivers (e.g., parents). These internal working models of the self and others influence how to behave in relationships and what to expect from them. Thus, children who receive warm and affectionate care will tend

to develop a secure attachment: they will consider themselves and others worthy of love and care and will expect others to act in this way with them, behaving affectionately as well with others. On the contrary, children who have received inadequate and unpredictable care will tend to develop an insecure attachment: not considering themselves and/or others worthy of love and care, they will tend to have difficulties in having relationships based on reciprocity, care, and trust (Bowlby 1969; Fraley 2019; Mikulincer and Shaver 2010).

Attachment theorists argue that from late adolescence onward, the romantic or sexual partner often becomes an important attachment figure. Each member of a couple will develop different expectations about themselves, the other, and the relationship based on their previous relational experiences with attachment figures and their romantic partner. In addition, they will develop different strategies of emotional regulation and patterns of interaction that will substantially condition their way of being and feeling in the relationship with the other individual (Fraley 2019; Mikulincer and Shaver 2010).

To understand differences in cognition, emotions, and behaviors in intimate relationships, the existence of two dimensions of romantic attachment was proposed, whose combination would lead to different attachment orientations or styles (Fraley and Roisman 2019). One of these dimensions is attachment-related avoidance, defined as the degree to which a person feels uncomfortable with the proximity and dependence of their partner, and consequently seeks to maintain emotional distance and independence. The other dimension is attachment-related anxiety, which is the degree of concern about a partner's availability and accessibility, and the anxious search for closeness and proximity with the partner (Mikulincer and Shaver 2020).

The attachment orientations entail different strategies for regulating emotions and intimacy (Bowlby 1969; Mikulincer and Shaver 2020; Théorêt et al. 2021). Studies have corroborated the relevance of attachment dimensions to understand different aspects of romantic relationships, including how to respond to a partner's needs, how to ask for support from a partner, and how to be receptive when being supported; other aspects include the openness, sensitivity, and quality of communication between partners, the ability to show gratitude, appreciation, and affection toward a partner, and the involvement in behaviors that can lead to greater or lesser commitment and relational stability (Brandão et al. 2020; Couture et al. 2021; McLeod et al. 2020; Seiffge-Krenke and Burk 2015). In general, people with a secure attachment demonstrate more of the dynamics that favor satisfaction, relational stability, and positive conflict management strategies than people with an insecure attachment (Candel and Turliuc 2019; Velotti et al. 2018).

Attachment orientations have also been linked to sexual aggression perpetration and victimization in intimate relationships (Bonache et al. 2019; Seiffge-Krenke and Burk 2015; Théorêt et al. 2021). This is because insecure orientations can imply dysfunctional ways of regulating the need for closeness vs. distance in a romantic relationship (Fernández-Fuertes et al. 2019; Théorêt et al. 2021). More specifically, in the meta-analysis carried out by Karantzas et al. (2016), the results indicated that attachment-related anxiety was significantly associated with sexual victimization, especially for females. Attachment-related avoidance was positively associated with the perpetration of sexual coercion, particularly in males. However, in some of the studies analyzed in this meta-analysis, different conclusions were found. In fact, more recent research describes inconsistencies in the findings. In the analysis of sexual victimization, both attachment-related anxiety and attachment-related avoidance have shown a positive association with suffering sexual aggression in males and females, as illustrated by Bonache et al. (2019). In contrast, the Brewer and Forrest-Redfern's study (2022), which included an all-female sample, found a positive relationship between victimization and attachment-related anxiety. However, they did not find a positive relationship between victimization and attachment-related avoidance, although the results of other studies, such as Dugal et al. (2021), point to a relationship between the two dimensions of attachment and victimization in both males and females.

In Sommer et al.'s work (2017), attachment-related anxiety predicted both self- and partner-perpetration of sexual aggression, regardless of sex. Attachment-related anxiety was also found to predict the perpetration of sexual aggression by males in the work by Cyr et al. (2018). However, neither of these two studies found attachment-related avoidance to be a significant predictor of the perpetration of sexual aggression. On the contrary, Fernández-Fuertes et al. (2019) did find a relationship between attachment-related avoidance and perpetration for both sexes. Barbaro et al. (2018) also found a positive association between attachment-related anxiety and sexual aggression perpetration in both males and females. Furthermore, the association was even stronger in males when they showed higher levels of attachment-related avoidance. Again, these mixed results point to the need for further studies on attachment: its effect on relationship influences and interactional patterns may help explain sexual partner aggression (Bonache et al. 2019; Capaldi et al. 2019).

1.2 | Partner Power/Influence

As explained above, the emotional and relational regulation processes underlying the attachment system are a component of intimate partner aggression incidents, as are issues of relational power and control (Capaldi et al. 2012, 2019). Power dynamics are also inherent to romantic relationships, and the ways these dynamics are developed and maintained have a great importance for the duration and quality of romantic relationships (Kim et al. 2019; Lennon et al. 2013; Zverling 2019).

The Dyadic Power Social-Influence Model (DPSIM; Simpson et al. 2015) integrates various concepts from the most relevant theories about power. In this model, power is considered a relational emergent factor defined as "the ability or capacity to change another person's thoughts, feelings, or behavior so they align with one's own desired preferences, along with the ability or capacity to resist influence attempts imposed by another person" (p. 409). To understand the complex dynamics of power in romantic relationships, one must consider the results of the power exercised in different areas of the relationship, as well as

the negotiation processes involved within it (Couture et al. 2024; Zverling 2019).

In some studies, the perception of personal power has been associated with greater relational satisfaction and other positive indicators of relational quality for males and females (Körner and Schütz 2021). However, in the study carried out by Bentley et al. (2007) the perception of greater power within their romantic relationships was a stronger predictor of relationship satisfaction for females than for males. Lennon et al. (2013) utilized a measurement that addressed the feeling of power over one's partner in the relationship and concluded that participants who experienced higher levels of power tended to report a lower level of relationship satisfaction. Although it should be noted that these studies used different measures of power, which may affect the conclusions drawn from them, it is unclear how and why males and females interpret and respond to the negotiation of relational power (Lennon et al. 2013; Simpson et al. 2015; Zverling 2019).

Studies on the effects of the balance of power between both members of the couple have yielded consistent results. However, in general, more egalitarian couples tend to show more relational quality and therefore more relationship satisfaction, and less intimate partner aggression (Capaldi et al. 2012; Dunbar and Abra 2021; Zverling 2019). Regarding sexual aggression, the need for control and power was found to be a significant predictor of perpetration and victimization among peers (Fernández-Fuertes et al. 2018). Some studies have focused on analyzing the relationship between power and the coercive and violent behaviors that can occur in romantic relationships. However, their results do not allow for consistent conclusions. For example, the study by Bentley et al. (2007) found that power was associated with psychologically and physically aggressive behavior for both sexes, although the partner's perceptions of power in the relationship only explained female perpetration, while self-perceptions of such power were significant predictors for both sexes. On the contrary, other studies show higher relational power to be associated with lower rates of intimate violence. Thus, Giordano et al. (2010) found sexual aggression perpetration to be associated with the perception of a less favorable balance of power, especially in the case of males. In addition, Overall et al. (2016) found a similar association, particularly in situations where the partner resists influence.

Few studies have specifically analyzed the association between power in romantic relationships and the existence of sexual aggression among adolescents and emerging adults. As previously stated, females are at greater risk of suffering sexual aggression in their intimate relationships, also in adolescence and emerging adulthood. Generally, this problem underlies an unequal power balance based on traditional gender norms (Leone and Conroy 2019). The limited number of studies with young couples points to the fact that a greater relational power in males is associated with higher rates of sexual victimization in females (Tirone and Katz 2020). A study by Toplu-Demirtaş and Fincham (2022) investigated individuals' satisfaction with power and concluded that a lower perceived relational power was associated with a greater dissatisfaction; in turn, this dissatisfaction was associated with a higher probability of aggression, including sexual ones, in both males and females.

1.3 | Conflict Management Strategies

Apart from relational power/influence, the ways adolescent and young couples negotiate and resolve conflicts are key to understanding the nature and development of their relationships. Several studies highlight the importance of how conflicts are handled and resolved in the stability and quality of these relationships (Capaldi et al. 2019; Courtain and Glowacz 2019). Moreover, the type of conflict management strategy employed is influenced by the attachment of the individuals (Bonache et al. 2019; González-Ortega et al. 2021).

A large body of research studies associates the use of positive conflict management strategies (e.g., commitment, collaborative negotiation, empathy, and reasoning) with positive indicators of romantic relationship quality and lower rates of aggression (Courtain and Glowacz 2019; Gesell et al. 2020; Overall et al. 2010). On the contrary, the negative strategies (e.g., escalation, avoidance, and withdrawal) are associated with indicators of lower relationship quality and higher rates of aggression (Bonache et al. 2019; Gesell et al. 2020; Ha et al. 2019). In fact, according to the DDS perspective, couple conflicts are considered a proximal relationship risk factor for intimate partner aggression (Capaldi et al. 2012, 2019).

The association between conflict management strategies and sexual aggression lacks study in adolescent and emerging adult romantic relationships. Existing data tend to show that the use of negative conflict management strategies is generally associated with higher rates of sexual aggression. Moreover, some studies have found a positive association between one's perception of a partner's use of negative strategies and one's victimization (Bonache et al. 2019; Katz and Myhr 2008), and perpetration of sexual aggression (Scott and Straus 2007). Other studies have concluded that an individual's reported use of negative conflict management strategies was associated with victimization (Bonache et al. 2019), perpetration (Loh and Gidycz 2006) or both (Rueda et al. 2021).

1.4 | Objectives and Hypotheses

This exploratory study seeks to contribute to the literature of sexual aggression in several meaningful ways. First, the existence of sexual aggression among emerging adults is explored, specifically in romantic relationships maintained at the time of the study. Second, sexual aggression perpetration and victimization by both males and females are analyzed. Third, we seek to go beyond the analysis of possible individual factors to improve the knowledge on the role of relational dynamics in this problem by exploring relational variables such as attachment, partner power/influence, and conflict management strategies. Finally, based on the assumption that the existence of sexual aggression (perpetration and victimization) in a romantic relationship may be conditioned by processes of interdependence (Capaldi et al. 2012, 2019), this study introduces significant methodological advances over some of the previous research:

the couple is used as the unit of analysis following the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) in a longitudinal design to offer clues that could guide the design and application of preventive programs targeted at emerging adults.

Based on the available literature, we expected attachment-related anxiety to be a significant predictor of the existence of sexual aggression (both perpetration and victimization) for males and females in their romantic relationships (Barbaro et al. 2018; Brewer and Forrest-Redfern 2022; Cyr et al. 2018; Sommer et al. 2017. Likewise, one would expect that possible threats to one's own power in the relationship (i.e., partner's attempts to influence) to be a predictor of male perpetration, and the perception of actual partner influence to be a predictor of female victimization (Giordano et al. 2010; Overall et al. 2016). Finally, regarding conflict management strategies, the use of negative ones could be hypothesized to predict perpetration and victimization for both sexes (Hines et al. 2020; Katz and Myhr 2008; Loh and Gidycz 2006; Rueda et al. 2021; Scott and Straus 2007).

2 | Materials and Methods

2.1 | Participants

Data were collected from a convenience sample of 133 young Spanish couples (age range observed = 18–24; mean age = 19.44; SD = 1.41) as part of a broader research project that addresses the quality and stability of dating relationships in emerging adulthood (18–25 years old; Arnett 2000). At T1, the mean age of males was 19.98 years old (SD = 1.61), and the mean age of females was 18.83 years old (SD = 0.83). The mean length of time of the relationship was 23.36 months (SD = 16.67; range = 2–56).

Given the study's topic and type of analysis used, the criteria for inclusion were as follows: (a) the participants were currently in a heterosexual and noncohabiting dating relationship of at least 1 month of duration, (b) the relationship was seen as committed or serious by both partners, and (c) that both were emerging adults (18–25 years old). Finally, the most common occupation for females (100%) and males (79.72%) was studying, mostly at the university (82.01% and 51.13%, respectively). After 9 months, participants were invited to participate again to evaluate the occurrence of new episodes of sexual violence. Although participants were not explicitly asked, most couples who did not complete the second phase of the study (T2; $N = 79$) stated that they had broken up before T2 (41.8%); others were untraceable (32.9%) or declined to continue in the research (25.3%). Finally, 54 couples completed the study: both T1 and T2 (40.6% of the initial sample).

2.2 | Procedure

Participants were recruited in Spain via a snowball procedure. The aims of the study and the invitation to participate were disseminated via email among university and youth organizations, and informative posters were placed in locations frequented by youth couples (e.g., pubs, gyms, libraries, and coffee shops). Those interested in participating were to send an email providing their email address and their partner's so they could receive more information about the study and then the link to the survey tool. In exchange for their participation, each member of the couple received a voucher worth 20 Euros to spend on books and stationery.

After giving their informed consent in the online survey tool, all participants were required to complete the survey (T1). They were informed about the anonymity and confidentiality of the information they provided. The survey took approximately 20 min to complete. To facilitate the identification of couples, participants were asked to enter both partners' email addresses and their date of birth. Nine months later, both members of the couple received a new invitation to participate after reconfirming their informed consent, as well as another link to the online survey about the existence of new episodes of sexual violence on their relationship (T2). Once both members of the couple had answered the survey and data could be matched between the respondent and the partner, email data and date of birth were properly deleted. This study was conducted after receiving ethical approval from the bioethics committee of the university and was pre-registered on a public database of the university (DOI: not included for anonymity). Protection of personal data and guarantees of confidentiality were granted by the university's protocols.

2.3 | Measures

Demographic variables. For the purposes of the study, a series of questions were generated *ad hoc* to gather information about age, sex, sexual orientation, nationality, relationship duration, studies, and occupation.

Romantic attachment. The Spanish version (Alonso-Arbiol et al. 2007) of the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R; Fraley et al. 2000) questionnaire was used to assess both Attachment-related Anxiety (18 items; e.g., "I'm afraid that I will lose my partner's love") and Attachment-related Avoidance (18 items; e.g., "I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down"). Previous work with the original scale and the scale adapted to Spanish (Nóblega et al. 2018; Sibley et al. 2005) support the bifactorial structure of the attachment dimensions. This version has shown adequate levels of internal consistency, as assessed by Cronbach's alpha for both subscales in the original study, including a Spanish population (Anxiety subscale, $\alpha = 0.87$; Avoidance subscale $\alpha = 0.85$) and the present study (Anxiety subscale, $\alpha = 0.86$; Avoidance subscale $\alpha = 0.73$). Participants were to rate their level of agreement with various statements on a scale ranging from 1 (Strong disagreement) to 7 (Strong agreement). Higher scores indicated higher levels of insecure attachment (attachment-related anxiety and attachment-related avoidance) (Appendix A).

Partner power/influence. The five items developed by Giordano et al. (2006) were used to assess the identification of the partner's attempts to influence him or her and the perception of actual partner influence according to the participants. The identification of a partner's attempts to influence was measured by the following items: "My partner wants to control what I do" and "My partner always tries to change me" (in this study $\alpha = 0.68$

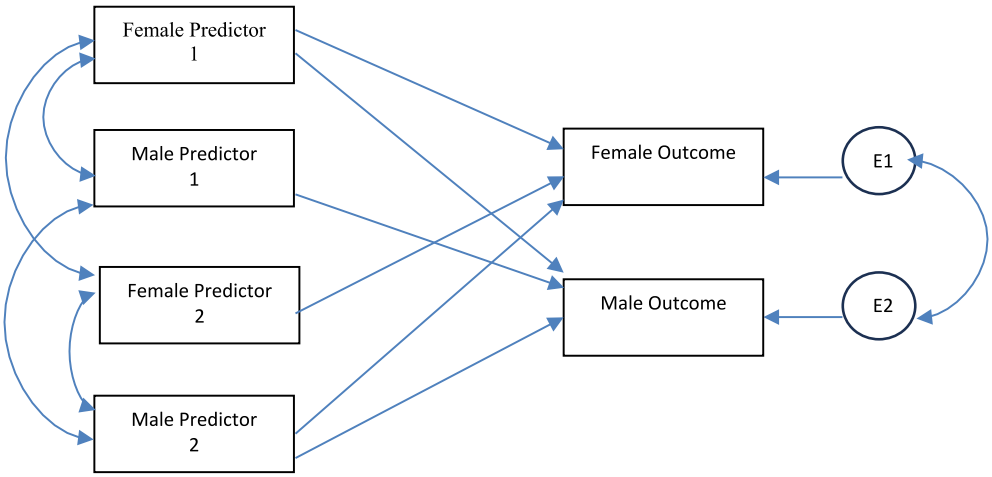

FIGURE 1 | Path analyses conducted to examine the relationships between predictors (attachment, partner power/influence, and conflict management strategies) and outcomes (sexual victimization and perpetration). *Note:* All predictors were allowed to correlate, and each outcome's error was correlated between male and female responses.

and in Giordano et al.'s study $\alpha = 0.77$); answer options ranged from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always). The perception of actual partner influence was studied by these items: "My partner often influences what I do", "I sometimes do things because my partner is doing them" and "I sometimes do things because I don't want to lose my partner's respect" (in this study $\alpha = 0.66$ and in Giordano et al.'s study $\alpha = 0.71$). Response options ranged from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always).

Positive and negative conflict management strategies. An adaptation of the Managing Affect and Differences Scale (MADS; Arellano and Markman 1995) was used to evaluate strategies in the management of daily conflicts in the couple's relationship. This scale is composed of seven subscales that assess the use of both positive (i.e., constructive; "When I feel hurt by my partner, I tell him/her") and negative conflict management strategies (i.e., destructive; "When we argue, I lose my temper easily") in couple disagreements. Answer options ranged from 1 (Strong disagreement) to 7 (Strong agreement). Higher scores indicated a higher endorsement of the strategies presented. More specifically, 19 items were included: 6 items from the Leveling subscale, 4 items from the Feedback subscale, and 3 items each from the Withdrawal, Negativity, and Negative escalation subscales. A discriminant validity analysis of the original scale indicated that dissatisfied couples reported more negative strategies and less positive strategies than satisfied couples; moreover, MADS strongly correlated with constructs such as relationship satisfaction, problem intensity, and efficacy (Arellano and Markman 1995). For the present work, internal consistencies for the positive and negative strategies were 0.79 and 0.73, respectively.

Sexual aggression perpetration and victimization. The four items from the sexual abuse subscale of the Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory (CADRI; Wolfe et al. 2001)—Spanish version (Fernández-Fuertes et al. 2006) were used; although this instrument was developed with samples of adolescents, it has also been used successfully with emerging adults (e.g., Garza et al. 2023; Thomas and Weston 2020). Each item is presented in a two-sided version: one to measure victimization (e.g., "S/he touched me sexually when I didn't want her/him to") and the other to measure perpetration (e.g., "I touched her/him sexually when s/he didn't want me to"). Participants were to assess the extent to which they have experienced the situations presented on a scale with four response options: Never (0), Seldom (1), Sometimes (2), and Often (3). The subscales on sexual aggression perpetration and victimization showed internal consistency values of $\alpha = 0.55$ and $\alpha = 0.57$, respectively, in the present study, similar to those obtained in the original validation with a Spanish sample ($\alpha = 0.56$ in both subscales; Fernández-Fuertes et al. 2006). These internal consistency levels can be considered acceptable, given the very small number of items in the subscales and the specific characteristics of the sample (e.g., Loewenthal and Lewis 2020; Nunnally and Bernstein 1994; Taber 2018). Furthermore, previous studies have demonstrated their validity in international contexts (e.g., Rivas-Koehl et al. 2023; Shorey et al. 2019). It is also worth noting that in behavioral scales assessing intimate partner violence, it is often difficult to achieve Cronbach's alpha values equal to or above the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70 (Ryan 2013).

2.4 | Data Analytic Strategy

Data were first screened for detecting outliers whose presence was ruled out. The missing data were also explored: given the small amount of them (less than 3%), they were replaced using sex-based mean substitution; to test whether this approach could influence the results, analyses were conducted with and without missing data (Tabachnick and Fidell 2013) and finally the dataset with the missing values substituted was used since the same conclusions were found. Then, descriptive statistics and mean differences according to sex were calculated for all variables.

To examine the relationships between predictors (romantic attachment, partner power/influence, and conflict management strategies) and outcomes (perpetration and victimization) for males and females, a twelve-path analysis based on the actor-partner interdependence model (APIM; Cook and Kenny 2005) was proposed: six to predict sexual aggression at T1 (three on perpetration and

three on victimization) and six to predict sexual aggression at T2 (three on perpetration and three on victimization) (see Figure 1). APIM assumes that one person's behavior is not only influenced by his/her behavior but also by his/her partner's behavior. Thus, the predictor variables for males and females were correlated, ensuring that the actor effects were estimated while controlling for the partner effects. When performing the analysis, the correlation between the residuals was also considered. Furthermore, considering that the primary objective of this study is to examine the associations between the variables of interest within the framework of the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kenny et al. 2006), and given the exploratory nature of the study, the interpretation of regression coefficients has been prioritized, allowing for a more flexible examination of actor and partner effects without imposing restrictive structural constraints. SPSS and AMOS 26.0, and a significance level of 0.05 to reject H_0, were used to conduct the analyses. Finally, the benchmarks established by Cohen (1988) for effect size were adopted to interpret the magnitude of differences found.

3 | Results

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations for each member of the couple. Related-samples t-tests were performed. They indicated that males identified more partner's attempts to influence than females [$t(132)=3.48$, $p=0.001$, $\eta^2=0.04$] and perceived more actual partner influence [$t(132)=2.94$, $p=0.004$, $\eta^2=0.03$]; however, it should be noted that the effect sizes found were small. Females, on the other hand, reported using more negative conflict management strategies than males [$t(132)=-6.721$, $p<0.001$], a conclusion supported by a large effect size ($\eta^2=0.15$). Concerning sexual aggression, at T1 males reported higher levels of sexual aggression perpetration against their partners [$t(132)=4.74$, $p<0.001$, $\eta^2=0.08$], and consequently, females reported higher levels of victimization than their partners [$t(132)=-2.90$, $p<0.001$, $\eta^2=0.09$]: the effect sizes found were medium; at T2, significant differences were found only in perpetration: males reported higher levels of sexual aggression perpetration against their partners [$t(53)=4.98$, $p<0.001$]; the effect size found was large ($\eta^2=0.32$).

TABLE 1 | Males' and females' mean scores (*M*) and standard deviations (SD) on the analyzed variables.

	Males *M* (SD)	Females *M* (SD)
Attachment anxiety	53.25 (17.30)	53.59 (18.39)
Attachment avoidance	39.28 (11.71)	39.13 (10.65)
Attempts to influence	7.96 (1.75)	6.74 (1.37)
Perceived influence	11.79 (1.63)	10.02 (1.41)
Positive conflict management strategies	42.17 (5.07)	41.95 (4.61)
Negative conflict management strategies	19.22 (5.21)	23.07 (5.05)
Sexual aggression perpetration (T1)	0.80 (1.12)	0.33 (0.64)
Sexual aggression victimization (T1)	0.53 (0.90)	0.80 (1.05)
Sexual aggression perpetration (T2)	1.46 (1.22)	0.48 (0.74)
Sexual aggression victimization (T2)	0.78 (0.86)	1.17 (1.46)

3.1 | Analysis of Perpetration

Table 2 shows the results of the analysis performed for male and female sexual aggression perpetration. The analysis to assess the relationship between attachment-related anxiety and avoidance and sexual aggression perpetration explained 10% of male and 9% of female perpetration at T1, and 6% and 3%, respectively, at T2. However, only a statistically significant result was found at T1: anxiety (actor effect) positively predicted perpetration for both males and females.

The analysis performed for the identification of the partner's attempts to influence, and the perception of actual partner influence explained 17% of male perpetration and 6% of female perpetration at T1, and 17% and 12%, respectively, at T2. At T1, only the partner's attempts to influence reported by males (actor effect) positively predicted male perpetration. At T2, male perpetration could be predicted by the perception that his partner is trying to influence the relationship (actor effect).

Finally, the analysis carried out for positive and negative conflict management strategies explained 17% of male perpetration and 3% of female perpetration at T1, and 19% and 26%, respectively, at T2. At T1, the male's negative conflict management strategies (actor effect) positively predicted male perpetration, and no statistically significant trends were found for female perpetration. At T2, male perpetration could be predicted by both male and female higher negative management strategies (actor and partner effects), while female perpetration could be predicted by less positive and more negative management strategies by males (partner effects).

3.2 | Victimization Analysis

Table 3 shows the results of the analysis performed for male and female sexual aggression victimization at both measuring points.

The analysis conducted to assess the relationship between attachment-related anxiety and avoidance, and sexual victimization explained 8% of both male and female victimization at T1, and 9% at T2. However, only anxiety (actor effect) significantly predicted sexual victimization (for both males and females) at T1. No variable included in the analysis explained male or female victimization at T2.

The analysis conducted to assess the relationship between sexual victimization and partner influence (partner's attempts to influence and perceived actual partner influence) explained 6% of the variance of male victimization and 8% of female victimization. The only statistically significant trend

TABLE 2 | Standardized weights and standard errors of the trajectories evaluated for each explanatory variable and the perpetration of sexual aggression by males and females at the two measuring points (T1 and T2).

	T1				T2			
	Male perpetration		Female perpetration		Male perpetration		Female perpetration	
	β	SE	*β*	SE	*β*	SE	*β*	SE
path analysis: attachment anxiety and avoidance								
Actor attachment anxiety	0.309***	0.006	0.292***	0.001	0.217	0.010	0.038	0.006
Actor attachment avoidance	−0.043	0.008	−0.119	0.005	−0.023	0.015	−0.130	0.010
Partner attachment anxiety	0.013	0.005	−0.072	0.003	−0.054	0.009	−0.110	0.006
Partner attachment avoidance	−0.076	0.009	−0.015	0.005	−0.117	0.016	0.095	0.009
Path analysis: attempts to influence and perceived influence								
Actor perception of partner's attempts to influence	0.380***	0.060	−0.056	0.043	0.154	0.103	−0.219	0.071
Actor perception of actual partner influence	−0.097	0.062	0.118	0.042	0.346**	0.109	0.111	0.071
Partner perception of partner's attempts to influence	0.050	0.071	−0.032	0.036	0.147	0.113	0.210	0.065
Partner perception of actual partner influence	0.093	0.069	0.145	0.038	−0.034	0.112	−0.104	0.069
Path analysis: positive and negative management strategies								
Actor positive conflict management strategies	0.025	0.019	−0.060	0.012	0.186	0.033	0.031	0.021
Actor negative conflict management strategies	0.313***	0.019	0.047	0.011	0.247*	0.032	0.059	0.019
Partner positive conflict management strategies	0.123	0.020	0.035	0.012	0.065	0.020	−0.366**	0.033
Partner negative conflict management strategies	0.179	0.018	0.141	0.011	0.264*	0.031	0.361**	0.020

Note: $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$.

that positively predicted male victimization at T1 was the partner's attempts to influence (actor effect); as for female victimization, the significant predictors were their perception of actual partner influence (actor effect) but also the partner's attempts to influence (partner effect) both in a positive manner. Females' sexual victimization at T2 was positively predicted by females' actual partner influence reported by males (partner effect).

Finally, the model analyzing the relationship between conflict management strategies and victimization explained 4% of the variance of male victimization and 34% of female victimization at both T1 and T2. At T1, only the females' use of negative conflict management strategies positively predicted their victimization (actor effect). At T2, females' sexual victimization could be predicted by higher negative management strategies from both the female and her partner (actor and partner effects), and by less positive management strategies from males (partner effect).

4 | Discussion

The present research utilized a dyadic and longitudinal design to analyze the predictive power of romantic attachment, partner power/influence, and couple conflict management strategies on sexual aggression (perpetration and victimization) in Spanish heterosexual emerging adults. First, the differences between males and females in these variables were explored. No statistically significant differences were found between males and females in the two dimensions of romantic attachment: anxiety and avoidance. Other studies with Spanish adolescents did find differences, such as a greater avoidance in males and a greater anxiety in females (Fernández-Fuertes et al. 2019). However, the age of the participants and the type of relationship typically maintained at the two different developmental stages (adolescence and emerging adulthood), as well as the use of couples as a unit of analysis may explain the absence of statistically significant differences in the present work, given that other studies conducted with older participants also found no sex differences (Bonache et al. 2019; Molero et al. 2016). Secondly, males identified more of their partner's attempts to influence them and a greater perception of actual partner influence than females, a finding consistent with the results of international studies (see Giordano et al. 2021), although the effect sizes found here were small. Thirdly, there was reported a greater use of negative conflict management strategies during couple disagreements by females than by males, which was consistent with

TABLE 3 | Standardized weights and standard errors of the trajectories evaluated for each explanatory variable and the victimization of sexual aggression by males and females at the two measuring points (T1 and T2).

	T1				T2			
	Male victimization		Female victimization		Male victimization		Female victimization	
	β	SE	*β*	SE	*β*	SE	*β*	SE
Path analysis: attachment anxiety and avoidance								
Actor attachment anxiety	0.225***	0.005	0.184*	0.005	0.233	0.007	−0.217	0.011
Actor attachment avoidance	0.019	0.007	0.051	0.009	0.093	0.010	0.105	0.018
Partner attachment anxiety	0.046	0.004	0.049	0.005	0.238	0.012	0.087	0.006
Partner attachment avoidance	−0.190	0.007	−0.148	0.007	−0.093	0.011	0.057	0.018
Path analysis: attempts to influence and perceived influence								
Actor perception of partner's attempts to influence	0.202*	0.044	0.045	0.065	0.194	0.076	0.184	0.137
Actor perception of actual partner influence	−0.027	0.047	0.198*	0.063	0.082	0.080	0.054	0.137
Partner perception of partner's attempts to influence	0.047	0.056	0.188*	0.051	0.115	0.083	0.013	0.013
Partner perception of actual partner influence	0.124	0.055	−0.050	0.055	0.085	0.083	0.339**	0.334
Path analysis: positive and negative management strategies								
Actor positive conflict management strategies	−0.001	0.016	0.051	0.018	0.009	0.024	−0.113	0.037
Actor negative conflict management strategies	0.171	0.016	0.341***	0.017	0.134	0.024	0.347**	0.034
Partner positive conflict management strategies	0.093	0.016	0.052	0.019	0.017	0.025	−0.328**	0.036
Partner negative conflict management strategies	0.155	0.015	0.077	0.018	0.136	0.023	0.263*	0.035

Note: *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.

other studies in Spain (e.g., González-Ortega et al. 2021), but with a moderate effect size. Finally, as also concluded in other studies about youth romantic relationships in Spain (e.g., Fernández-Fuertes et al. 2020; Sebastián et al. 2014), males admitted more perpetration of sexual aggression than females (at both T1 and T2; moderate and large effect sizes, respectively), and females reported more victimization than males, but only at T1 was this difference statistically significant. The lack of a total coincidence between sexual aggression reported by each partner may be attributed to accidental (e.g., memory gaps) or intentional (e.g., social desirability) biases in the answers given, without ruling out other possibilities, such as possible normalization of aggressive behavior, which could occur throughout the course of a romantic relationship (Capaldi et al. 2019; Fernández-Fuertes et al. 2020; Vicario-Molina et al. 2015).

Regarding the explanation of sexual aggression perpetration, it is necessary to note that few significant relationships were found in this exploratory research; although these variables had not been previously analyzed in young Spanish couples, they had been shown to have explanatory importance in different international studies about sexual aggression, as previously pointed out in this paper. In this work, as expected, at T1 male perpetration was explained by attachment-related anxiety (actor effect; positive relationship), partner's attempts to influence (actor effect; positive relationship), and negative conflict management strategies (actor effect; positive relationship), whereas at T2, their perpetration was explained by their perception of actual partner influence (actor effect; positive relationship) and negative conflict management strategies (both actor and partner effects; positive relationships). Regarding female perpetration, at T1 it was only explained by attachment-related anxiety (actor effect; positive relationship); and at T2, significant predictors were positive (partner effect; negative relationship) and negative conflict management strategies (partner effect; positive relationship). Thus, these results suggest that male perpetration of sexual aggression is more likely when they experience a greater concern about the partner's availability and accessibility, detect what could be interpreted as threats to their power/influence in the relationship, and more frequently implement negative conflict management strategies in the romantic relationship; in the case of females, their perpetration, which is less common than that of males (Krahé et al. 2015), appears to be more likely when insecurities about the relationship that characterize attachment-related anxiety emerge and when their partners' negative conflict management strategies are more frequent

than their positive ones and this dysfunctional dynamic continues over time (T2).

As for victimization, few significant relationships were also found. In males, two predictors previously found for their perpetration at T1 also appeared here: as hypothesized, attachment-related anxiety (actor effect; positive relationship) but unexpectedly also partner's attempts to influence (actor effect; positive relationship); however, negative conflict management strategies were not a significant predictor, contradicting our hypotheses. In females, four predictors were obtained for victimization at T1: as expected, attachment-related anxiety (actor effect; positive relationship), the perception of actual partner influence (actor effect; positive relationship), and negative conflict management strategies (actor effect; positive relationship), but also partner's attempts to influence (partner effect; positive relationship); at T2, four significant predictors were found: the perception of actual partner influence (partner effect; positive relationship) and positive (partner effect; negative relationship) and negative conflict management strategies (both actor and partner effect; positive relationships). Thus, higher levels of attachment-related anxiety were found to be related to more sexual aggression victimization in both sexes. In addition, power/influence was also a relevant relational factor in explaining victimization: in the case of males, it was the partner's attempts to influence, whereas in females, it was their perception of actual partner influence as well as partner's attempts to influence, last reported by males. Finally, when females admitted to more negative conflict management strategies (by themselves or their partners) and fewer partner's positive conflict management strategies, they were also more likely to report being sexually victimized in their romantic relationships. It therefore seems that the way partners manage conflict may be relevant for understanding female victimization, but not as much for male victimization.

The finding of more significant predictors for male perpetration than for female perpetration, and more significant predictors for female victimization than for male victimization, could be related to the fact that males tend to report more sexual aggression perpetration and females more sexual aggression victimization (Kharé et al. 2015; Fernández-Fuertes et al. 2020). It is also possible that male and female sexual aggression (perpetration and victimization) does not respond to the same precursors. However, in the systematic review of risk factors for intimate partner violence by Capaldi et al. (2012), regarding gender issues, it was concluded that "overall there are more similarities than differences in risk factors" (p. 27), although most of the available studies analyzed in this research did not explore sexual aggression in young couples, but physical and/or psychological aggression.

It is known that attachment-related anxiety is related to sexual aggression (Seiffge-Krenke and Burk 2015; Stefansen et al. 2021; Théorêt et al. 2021), but also to certain aspects associated with it, such as gaining power over one's partner (Karantzas et al. 2016). Although the design of this exploratory study does not allow us to establish causal relationships or validate theoretical models that ensure robust conclusions, we could speculate that, in the case of males, their perpetration of sexual aggression is consistent with a scenario in which they feel threatened about their power in the relationship (Giordano et al. 2010; Leone and Conroy 2019; Overall et al. 2016; Tirone and Katz 2020; Toplu-Demirtaş and Fincham 2022), but also the relationship itself (Barbaro et al. 2018; Cyr et al. 2018; Hines et al. 2020; Sommer et al. 2017), and they practice negative conflict management strategies more frequently (Ha et al. 2019; Loh and Gidycz 2006; Scott and Straus 2007). Based on these results, and considering that male victimization was positively associated with attachment-related anxiety, but also with partner's attempts to influence, these conclusions could be related to relational dynamics that, from males' perspective, are characterized by emotional insecurities, power struggles, and the use of negative conflict management strategies, which are characteristic of dysfunctional couples or couples in crisis (Dailey 2019; Espelage et al. 2022; Johnson et al. 2015; Molero et al. 2016).

In this study, with regard to female perpetration, the relationship between attachment-related anxiety and their sexual aggression was found, but also between a higher frequency of negative conflict management strategies and a lower frequency of positive ones by males. Therefore, the anxious search for closeness and proximity to the partner can be defined as a risk factor for females as well, an expected conclusion (Barbaro et al. 2018; Hines et al. 2020; Sommer et al. 2017), as well as a dysfunctional way of dealing with conflict on the part of the romantic partner that is prolonged over time (Creasey 2002; Fernet et al. 2016). In the Brewer and Forrest-Redfern's study (2022), females with a high level of attachment-related anxiety were more likely to report personal experience of unwanted sex, a result also obtained here. This same study also concluded that those females were less likely to confront their partners about their inappropriate sexual behavior. In our study this construct was not analyzed, but power/influence, that is, the perception of actual partner influence (actor effect; both T1 and T2) and partner's attempts to influence (partner effect; T1), and they were significant predictors of female victimization. Thus, these data might suggest that when females detect power imbalances against them and males perceive threats to their power status in the relationship, female victimization is more likely to be reported (Leone and Conroy 2019; Tirone and Katz 2020), especially if females also engage in using negative conflict management strategies (Bonache et al. 2019; Hines et al. 2020). Results also indicated that dysfunctional conflict management strategies accounted for female sexual victimization and not male victimization. This finding is consistent with previous research, which suggests that female engagement in negative conflict resolution strategies, combined with male partners' use of avoidance or withdrawal strategies, may increase the likelihood of male perpetration (Aguilera-Jiménez et al. 2021; Novo et al. 2016; Rojas-Solís et al. 2019). However, other studies, although not conducted with couples, concluded that when negative conflict management strategies are more predominant than positive ones, victimization is more likely to occur in both sexes (Bonache et al. 2019; De La Rue et al. 2014). Therefore, further dyadic studies should be conducted to examine whether only females who are more exposed to dysfunctional conflict resolution dynamics are in a position of greater vulnerability.

Certain limitations should be considered when interpreting these results. First, a convenience sample of heterosexual romantic relationships was used, making it impossible to generalize the results to the population of young people. In addition, no methods were employed that could ensure that participants

actually maintained a couple relationship. Moreover, the information obtained comes from a community rather than a clinical sample: it is likely that higher levels of aggression perpetration and higher victimization of females would be found in the latter. We cannot rule out bias, specifically self-selection bias, whereby more conflictual couples, or couples with higher levels of aggression may have declined to participate in this study. There is also a considerable sample loss between T1 and T2, because many couples had broken up, were untraceable, or declined to continue in the research; in future studies, it would be interesting to evaluate whether this could be related to the occurrence of violence or not: in this work, this was not possible given that the current standards of the university ethics committee require that participants can leave the study without explanation. Given the format of the questionnaire used (an online survey), it is difficult to ensure that all participants responded individually. In addition, some of the instruments showed relatively low alpha values, which could be attributed to factors such as the limited number of items composing the scales and the sample size of this study (Loewenthal and Lewis 2020; Nunnally and Bernstein 1994; Taber 2018). As noted in previous literature (see Ryan 2013), low reliability coefficients can also be expected when dealing with complex constructs such as intimate partner violence during courtship (e.g., highly skewed data, gender differences). Although the values observed here were consistent with those reported in prior studies using the same instruments, future research would benefit from the development or selection of measures with higher internal consistency. It would also be advisable to evaluate all predictors at T2: this would have allowed complementary analyses to those carried out in this work (e.g., to perform the analyses with the T2 data controlling for the aggressions reported at T1). Finally, the correlational nature of the research design does not allow us to precisely determine causal relationships. Therefore, it would be valuable to conduct complementary studies to not only mitigate the limitations of this research, but also to confirm the results found, as well as the greater predictive power that actor effects seem to have over partner effects on sexual aggression (both perpetration and victimization).

Nevertheless, this exploratory study contributes to a better understanding of the relational variables and dynamics that may explain the occurrence of sexual aggression in young people's intimate partner relationships. The use of the APIM (Cook and Kenny 2005) in this longitudinal study allows for a more adequate analysis of how the characteristics of both partners may influence each other in initiating and even maintaining sexual aggression in a couple's relationship. It also points to the extent to which the exchange of needs between partners and their subsequent satisfaction or nonfulfillment may influence the risk of sexual aggression in the couple. Moreover, these results help to clarify the predictive power of the variables studied (adult attachment, partner power/influence, and conflict management strategies) in the perpetration and victimization of sexual aggression in the romantic relationships of young Spanish adults.

5 | Conclusion

Our results indicate that young males perpetrate more sexual aggression, and that young females suffer more sexual aggression in romantic relationships. In terms of explaining sexual aggression (both perpetration and victimization), attachment-related anxiety was a predictor for both males and females. Power/influence was also related to this problem: males tended to report more sexual aggression (perpetration and victimization) when they felt that their partners were trying to gain power in the relationship; in females, a possible effect of the previous finding could be observed: their victimization was more likely when they perceived more partner influence, and their partners reported more female attempts to influence. Finally, conflict management strategies also had explanatory significance: the negative ones were related to the existence of this problem (e.g., male perpetration and female victimization).

In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of developing interventions that go beyond the individual level and address relational dynamics (Tharp et al. 2011) by empowering young people to negotiate and manage interdependence as a couple, seeking a balance in relational power and avoiding negative conflict management strategies. Through comprehensive sex education that teaches healthy relationship skills, avoiding negative conflict management strategies, it is possible to help young couples better handle disagreements, raising awareness of the importance of voluntary consent (Martín-Domínguez 2023); thus, it would be possible not only to improve the quality of their romantic relationships but also to prevent problems such as sexual aggression (Bonache et al. 2019; Capaldi et al. 2019; Courtain and Glowacz 2019; González-Ortega et al. 2021; Körner and Schütz 2021; Leone and Conroy 2019). There also are benefits to implementing evidence-based social–emotional learning programs that support healthy relationship skills and promote the ethics of mutual care and voluntary consent, as these interventions are recognized as key for mental health promotion and violence prevention among youth (Capaldi et al. 2019; Collibee and Furman 2014). Moreover, psychological support services to address attachment-related anxiety by promoting secure bonds between partners could help young people develop secure and healthy bonds, a strategy that could be beneficial for both males and females, as indicated in previous studies (Bonache et al. 2019; Brandão et al. 2020; Feeney and Fitzgerald 2019; Théorêt et al. 2021). It would also be interesting to conduct awareness campaigns on the importance of equal power and constructive conflict management in romantic relationships: they can help change social norms and reduce the acceptance of sexual aggression (Edwards and Sessarego 2018). Finally, this paper also raises the need for further dyadic and longitudinal studies to help investigate relational variables that may predict and help prevent sexual aggression in couples. Future research should also develop and test more complex and integrated explanatory models to inform the design of effective intervention strategies.

Author Contributions

Isabel Vicario-Molina: data curation, formal analysis, investigation, methodology, writing – original draft. **Andrés A. Fernández-Fuertes:** conceptualization, methodology, investigation, resources, validation, writing – original draft. **Antonio Fuertes:** conceptualization, supervision, project administration, funding acquisition, writing – review and editing. **M. Begoña Orgaz-Baz:** formal analysis, methodology, visualization, writing – review and editing. All authors have actively participated in all phases of the manuscript.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in Universidad de Salamanca (GREDOS) at https://gredos.usal.es/handle/10366/152492.

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Appendix A

Romantic attachment: the Spanish version (Alonso-Arbiol et al., 2007) of the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R; Fraley et al., 2000)

	Strongly disagree						**Strongly agree**
My romantic partner makes me doubt myself	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Sometimes romantic partners change their feelings about me for no apparent reason	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on romantic partners	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I am very comfortable being close to romantic partners	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My partner only seems to notice me when I'm angry	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
It makes me mad that I don't get the affection and support I need from my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My desire to be very close sometime scares people away	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I worry a lot about my relationships	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I talk things over with my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
When I show my feelings for romantic partners, I'm afraid they will not feel the same about me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I am nervous when a partner gets too close to me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel comfortable sharing my private thoughts and feelings with my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I'm afraid that once a romantic partner gets to know me, he or she won't like who I really am	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I worry that I won't measure up to other people	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I tell my partner just about everything	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I'm afraid that I will lose my partner's love	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I prefer not to be too close to romantic partners	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My partner really understands me and my needs	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I don't feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
It's easy for me to be affectionate with my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I don't often worry about being abandoned	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I find it relatively easy to get close to my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I find it easy to depend on romantic partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I often wish that my partner's feelings for me were as strong as my feelings for him or her	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Strongly disagree						Strongly agree
It's not difficult for me to get close to my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I rarely worry about my partner leaving me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
When my partner is out of sight, I worry that he or she might become interested in someone else	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I often worry that my partner will not want to stay with me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Partner power/influence: the five items developed by Giordano et al. (2006) were used to assess the identification of the partner's attempts to influence him or her and the perception of actual partner influence.

The identification of a partner's attempts to influence:

	Never				Always
My partner wants to control what I do	1	2	3	4	5
My partner always tries to change me	1	2	3	4	5

The perception of actual partner influence:

	Never				Always
My partner often influences what I do	1	2	3	4	5
I sometimes do things because my partner is doing them	1	2	3	4	5
I sometimes do things because I don't want to lose my partner's respect	1	2	3	4	5

Positive and negative conflict management strategies: The Managing Affect and Differences Scale (MADS; Arellano & Markman, 1995).

	Strong disagreement						Strong agreement
When I feel hurt by my partner, I tell him/her	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I help my partner to understand what I am saying	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
When I am angry with my partner, I say it to him/her	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
When I am disappointed with my partner, I tell him/her that	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I say to my partner when he/she has done something that bothers others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I offer constructive alternatives for bothersome behavior	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I try to check with my partner whether my interpretations are accurate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I summarise my partner's message to make sure that I understand his/her point of view	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
When issue arises, I ask my partner directly how he/she feels or thinks about it	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If do not understand partner's point of view, I ask him/her for elaboration	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
When discussing issues, I remain silent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
When problems arise, I often leave the room	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
When discussing issues, I usually withdraw	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I often interpret partner's messages more negatively than they are intended	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I often hassle and nag my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I get on my partner's nerves	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Strong disagreement						Strong agreement
I am unable to get out of heated arguments with my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
When we argue, my negative feelings rise quickly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
When we argue, I lose my temper easily	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sexual aggression perpetration and victimization: the sexual abuse subscale of the Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory (CADRI; Wolfe et al., 2001) – Spanish version (Fernández-Fuertes et al., 2006)

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often
I touched her/him sexually when s/he didn't want me to	0	1	2	3
S/he touched me sexually when I didn't want her/him to	0	1	2	3
I forced her/him to have sex when s/he didn't want to	0	1	2	3
S/he forced me to have sex when I didn't want to	0	1	2	3
I threatened her/him in an attempt to have sex with her/him	0	1	2	3
S/he threatened me in an attempt to have sex with me	0	1	2	3
I kissed her/him when s/he didn't want me to	0	1	2	3
S/he kissed me when I didn't want her/him to	0	1	2	3