

Introduction

- Romantic attachment is related to different aspects of sexual behaviors (Dewitte et al., 2012, Davis et al., 2006) and to several psychosexual variables (Péloquin et al., 2014; Stefanou & McCabe, 2012).
 - For example, individuals who exhibit avoidant or anxious attachment tend to have higher rates of sexual dysfunctions, a negative view of their sexuality and to exhibit sexual aversion, anxious attachment is more detrimental to sexual functioning (Birnbaum et al., 2007).
- Less emphasis has been put on the relation between romantic attachment insecurity and sexual concerns as well as dysfunctional sexual behaviors.
 - Yet, attachment insecurity is related to the presence of interfering thoughts during sexual activities and to sexual anxiety (Birnbaum et al., 2007, Davis et al., 2006). Anxious and avoidant attachment are also associated with sexual risk taking, engaging in behaviors such as unprotected sex, infidelity or unwanted but consensual sex with partners (Schmitt et al., 2014; Simons et al., 2015).
- The extent to which attachment insecurity influences the presence of sexual difficulties is likely related to intrapersonal factors that need to be more extensively identified (Dewitte, 2012). Mindfulness dispositions may be particularly important in relation to sexual difficulties and may buffer the potential negative effect of attachment because, for example, of capacities to notice internal reactions efficiently.
 - Mindfulness is defined as paying attention to the present moment, as it unfolds, in a non judgemental way (Baer, 2003).
 - Mindfulness-based treatments are increasingly studied in sex therapy (Brotto & Smith, 2014; Mize, 2015).
 - The relationship between attachment and mindfulness has mostly been studied through the mediation of other factors, such as emotional regulation (Caldwell & Shaver, 2013), but we know little on the potential protective role of mindfulness in the relationship between attachment insecurity and sexual difficulties.

Objectives

Study the link between insecure attachment and sexual difficulties, and the potential protective role of mindfulness in the relation between attachment and sexual difficulties.

Hypothesis

Higher levels of mindfulness will buffer the effects of attachment insecurity on sexual difficulties.

Method

- 468 adult participants were recruited on a voluntary basis through social medias and Email server lists from the community (Quebec, Canada).
- 68% Women, 32% Men
- Age 18 to 75 years old (M = 29, SD = 10.8)
- Relationship status : 62% in a relationship, 12% married, 26% single

Respond to an anonymous survey including measures of:

- Mindfulness:** The five facet mindfulness questionnaire, FFMIND, (Baer et al., 2008)
- Romantic attachment:** Experiences in close relationships, ECR-12 (Brennan et al., 1998; Lafontaine et al., 2015; Brassard et al. 2012)
 - 54% Avoidant (46% non-avoidant) , 52% Anxious (48% non-anxious)
- Sexual difficulties:** Trauma symptom inventory, TSI-2 (Briere, 2011); two subscales: a) Sexual concerns : 6% Clinically significant, 7% Problematic
b) Dysfunctional sexual behaviors :
6% Clinically significant, 6% Problematic

Results

Table 1. Correlation Matrix

	1.	2.	3.	M	ET
1. Anxious attachment	-	-	-	.52	.5
2. Avoidant attachment	.07	-	-	.54	.5
3. Mindfulness	-.34**	-.25**	-	82	11.7
4. Sexual Difficulties (total score)	.17**	.16**	-.40**	4.2	4.5

Results showed that the direct relation between avoidant attachment and sexual difficulties was significant (B = .68, p < 0.001).

Figure 1. Moderation of the link between sexual difficulties & avoidant attachment, through mindfulness levels

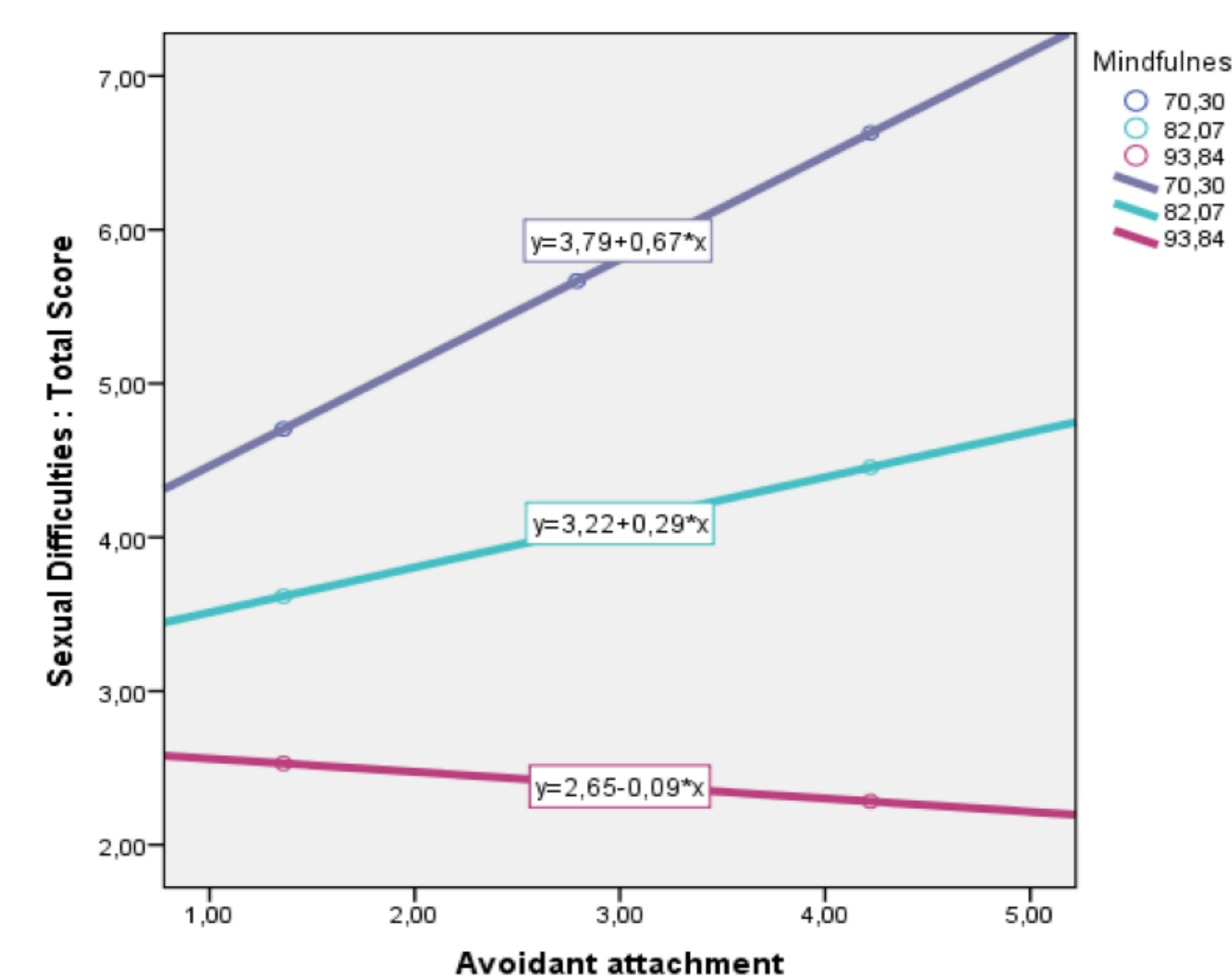
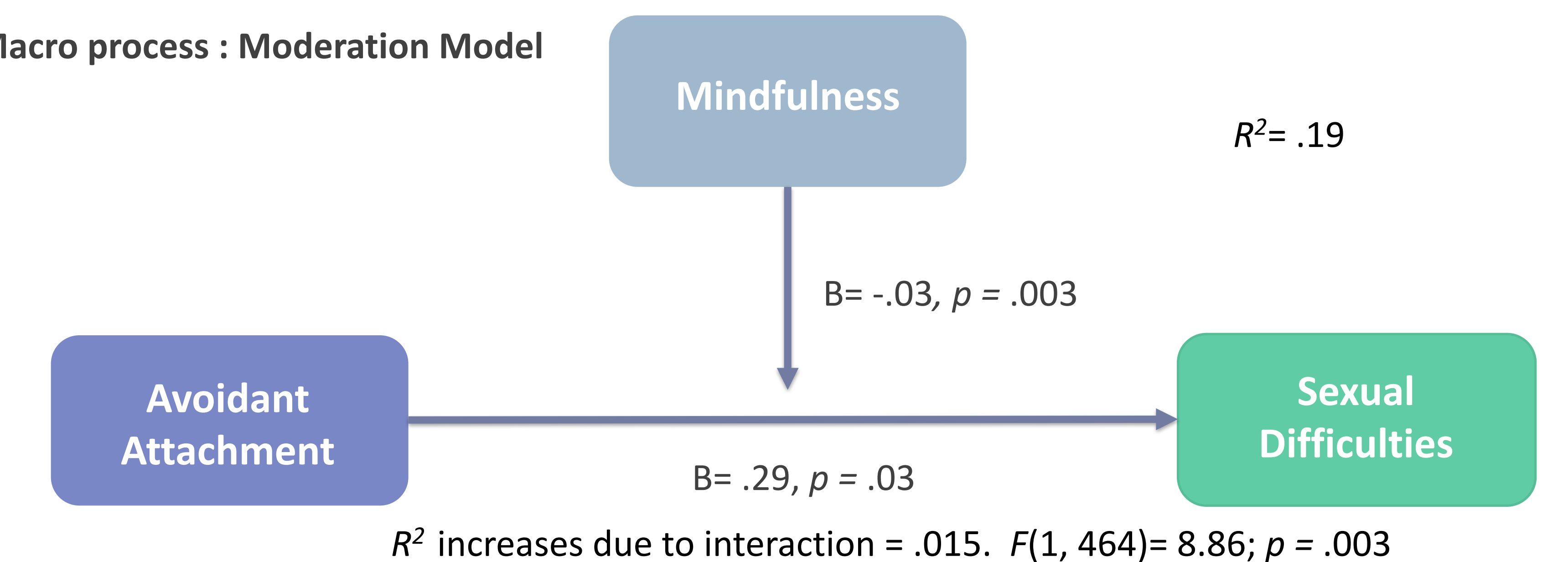


Table 2. Macro process : Johnson-Neyman technique

Mindfulness	Effect	S.E.	t	p
66.5	.79	.21	3.9	.0001***
70	.68	.18	3.8	.0002***
73.5	.57	.16	3.6	.0003***
77	.46	.14	3.2	.0013**
80.5	.34	.13	2.5	.0117**
82 (M)	.27	.14	1.9	.0500*
84	.23	.14	1.6	.1008
87.5	.12	.15	.76	.4454
91	.005	.18	.03	.9768
94.5	-.11	.20	-.53	.5939

Note *p ≤ 0.05 **p ≤ 0.01 ***p ≤ 0.001

Figure 2. Macro process : Moderation Model



Discussion

In line with previous studies (Péloquin et al., 2014, Davis et al., 2006), findings highlight the importance of considering attachment insecurity when examining sexual difficulties in adults.

- Our results indicate that the impact of **avoidant attachment** on sexuality can be tempered by above average mindfulness disposition: **An above average score of mindfulness (≥ 82) had a protective effect, buffering the deleterious effect of attachment avoidance on sexual difficulties.**
- Although **attachment anxiety was related to more sexual difficulties**, mindfulness **did not** affect this relation.

High rates of avoidant & anxious attachment were observed in this sample.

- Which is in line with a recent comprehensive review of adult attachment assessments in nonclinical populations suggesting that 40% percent have an “insecure” attachment (Wilhelm et al., 2016).

Clinical implications :

- Findings may provide therapists with a better understanding of the possible negative impacts of an avoidant attachment on sexuality, as well as with a frame to address these impacts; through mindfulness training.
- A variety of mindfulness based treatments have been successfully validated in sex therapy (Mize, 2015). Our results suggest that these treatments could be particularly beneficial for avoidant individuals experiencing sexual difficulties.

Limitations :

- Cross-sectional design, no causality conclusions can be drawn.
- Self report questionnaires may induce biases.

Future Research :

- Further analysis need to be conducted in larger/clinical samples, using longitudinal designs and examining gender differences.
- It would be useful to study disorganized attachment, and fearful attachment (high anxiety and avoidance).
- Systemic study including the two partners may deepen our understanding of the links between attachment, mindfulness and sexual difficulties.