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## **Defensive styles and sexual motives**

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## **Styles défensifs et motivations sexuelles**

## **Defensive styles and sexual motives**

Objectives: Recent years have seen renewed interest for the study of motivations underlying the adoption of sexual behavior. And yet, there is still very little investigation into the psychological determinants of sexual motivation. To contribute to this field of knowledge we analyze the relationships between defense mechanisms and sexual motivations. Method: Data for 295 subjects were collected online (241 women, 54 men, mean age: 23.26 years). The evaluation of defensive functioning was carried out using the Defense Style Questionnaire in its 28-item version. Sexual motivations were assessed using the French translation of the Reason for Having Sex Questionnaire (YSEX). Main results: loving and physical motives lead most frequently to sexual relations. Positive correlations were found between mature defense styles and the number of sexual partners. Multiple regression analysis shows that defenses significantly contribute to explaining between 4.4 and 6.7 % of variance in sexual motives. Regardless of the defensive style considered, the correlation is positive. Immature defense mechanisms are the main defenses related to sexual motives. Results are discussed according to literature on sexual motives and literature on defense mechanisms. Conclusion: Psycho-sexological consultations investigating motivations for sexuality could benefit from a differential approach based on prior assessment of defensive functioning in order to best individually adapt clinical care.

Keywords: Defense mechanisms, sexual behaviors, sexual motivations, defense styles, sexuality

## **1. Introduction**

This article addresses the links between psychological vulnerabilities and sexual behavior through the study of the relationships between psychological defense mechanisms and sexual motivations.

### **1.1. Sexual motivation**

Recent years have seen renewed interest for the study of motives underlying the adoption of sexual behavior. Works, mostly from a functionalist perspective, show that sexuality can serve a plurality of functions; both interpersonal, physical and emotional (Hill et Preston 1996; Cooper et al. 1998, 2011; Meston et Buss 2007). Sexuality would allow for a plurality of goals and/or multiple, individual-specific needs to be met. Pleasure or love are among the main drivers of sexual relationships. However, they can also be adopted to avoid negative situations (linked to social, physical, emotional pressures...) or to promote integration into a social group (for example during adolescence). Individuals can adopt sexual behaviors because they want to know themselves better, test their limits or acquire resources. Sex can be consented - but not necessarily desired - to reassure or communicate with a partner.

Researchers also documented the links between sexual motivations and risky sexual behaviors<sup>1</sup>. Significant correlations have been found with condom use (Hill et Preston 1996; Cooper et al. 1998; Browning et al. 2000) or alcohol consumption before sex (Grossbard et al. 2007). Similarly, links between sexual motivations and number of sexual partners have been documented (Cooper et al. 1998; Grossbard et al. 2007). Even though the number of sexual partners is not in itself pathological, it represents a risk factor in increasing the likelihood of unwanted pregnancies (Upson et al. 2010) or reduced condom use (Štulhofer et al. 2010). The impact of sexual motivations on the quality of life for individuals or the couple has also been

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<sup>1</sup> We define risk sexual behaviors with Cooper et al (1998) as behaviors that increase the likelihood of exposure to negative sexual health outcomes.

highlighted. Motives directed to the attainment of personal or social benefits (approach motives, cf. Cooper et al., 1998) are associated with couple satisfaction and greater proximity between partners (Impett et al. 2005). Similarly, sexuality motivated by a desire to express feelings of love or a commitment to one's partner would be predictive of sexual satisfaction (Stephenson et al. 2011).

Investigation of determinants of sexual motivations focused mainly on variabilities according to biological gender (Hatfield et al. 2010; Gouvernet et al. 2016). Despite some significant differences, the gaps between men and women are small, especially in our Western societies. They should be examined more in psychosocial than biological terms (Gouvernet et al. 2017). The scientific literature also highlights links between personality types and sexual motivations, via the study of the five major dimensions of personality (Meston et Buss 2007) or attachment profiles (Schachner et Shaver 2004; Gouvernet et al. 2015a). It suggests the existence of correlations between lasting and stable ways of perceiving, acting, interacting and sexual motivations. For example, in individuals with an anxious attachment style, sex is preferentially adopted to respond to feelings of insecurity and strengthen the feeling of intimacy. For avoidant individuals, sexuality is more motivated by self-centered concerns (assertiveness, physical pleasure, seeking social benefit) or by the objectification of the other.

## **1.2. Defense mechanisms**

In order to contribute to these reflections, we propose a study of the relationship between defense mechanisms and motivations for sexuality. Defense mechanisms are concepts derived from psychoanalytic theorizations (Freud 1894, 1936). They refer to dispositional psychological mechanisms affecting the perception of a situation and its evaluation (Chabrol et Callahan 2004; Gouvernet et al. 2015c). They are related to, but not superimposed on, broader personality dimensions (Perry et al. 1998) and attachment styles (Mikulincer et Orbach 1995; Dykas et Cassidy 2011; Prunas et al. 2019; Ciocca et al. 2020). Their evolution

depends on the vagaries of developmental history, both psychological (cognitive, emotional, etc.) and interactional (Cramer 1999, 2012).

Defense mechanisms are predictive of mental and physical health and social adjustment (Vaillant 1993; Cramer 2006). For a long time considered pathogenic (e.g. Haan 1963), a consensus has nevertheless emerged in the literature considering their organization along an adaptive hierarchy opposing, in its extremes, mature and immature defenses (Vaillant 1971). Mature defensive functioning, characterized by the use of flexible and well-adjusted defenses to potential stressors (e.g. sublimation, humor, anticipation), fosters optimal management of aversive situations. Such functioning enables appropriate cognitive and emotional resources to be mobilized and facilitates social interactions (Benjamin 1995). On the other hand, the most immature, massive and rigid defenses (e.g. passive aggression, acting-out, projection) hinder the subject's ability to react adaptively to stress. By shaping a distorted representation of reality, they contribute to the mobilization of inadequate psychological resources and weaken the subject in his social relations. However, the use of immature defenses is not inherently pathogenic. The vulnerability stems more from their long-term persistence and predominance in an individual. Thus, when the stressors are important and difficult to control, immature defenses can be mobilized to allow some temporary relief until more flexible defenses are mobilized in a second stage.

The recognition of defensive functioning is decisive in psychological, medical and social care. It allows the identification of a subject's protective and risk factors. Defensive mechanisms provide information on the personal significance of a situation for an individual (Freud 1936; Vaillant 1993; Gouvernet et al. 2015b). Thus, their evaluation contributes to the development of an optimal therapeutic alliance (Despland et al. 2001; Laconi et al. 2014).

Studies dealing with defense mechanisms focus mainly on their intrapsychic functions. Fewer focus on relationships or sexual behaviors. However, some research has highlighted the

relevance of this field of research. In particular, the mobilization of immature defenses contributes to low marital satisfaction (Ungerer et al. 1997; Bouchard et Thériault 2003). Correlations between immature defenses on the one hand and the frequency of orgasms, alcohol consumption prior to sexual behaviors or with the adoption of risky sexual behaviors on the other hand have been found (Costa et Brody 2008, 2010, 2013). However, paradoxical results emerge from these studies:

- Immature defenses are positively correlated with alcohol consumption before sexual intercourse. In this sense they are sexual risk factors (Costa et Brody 2010)
- Immature defenses are positively correlated with condom use. They are therefore also protective factors (Costa et Brody 2008). For Costa and Brody (op. cit.) this result can be related to difficulties in tolerating dual intimate relationships for the most psychologically fragile subjects (op. cit., p. 2524).

Some criticisms have been formulated against these works. They concern in particular the omission of the effect of age in the analysis of results (e.g. Potterat, 2013). Defensive maturity is age-related and age is negatively correlated with condom use (Sheeran et al. 1999). Similarly, age is associated with an increased number of sexual partners (Richter et al. 1993). Therefore, interpretations in terms of psychological mechanisms are questionable in the absence of consideration of sociodemographic covariates. To address these objections, Brody and Costa conducted further analyses of their initial data on the relationship between immature defenses and behavior by statistically controlling for the age effect (Brody et Costa 2013). Consistent with the criticisms of Potterat (2013), the results show that age is negatively correlated both with the use of immature defenses and the importance attributed to coitus. The analysis of partial correlations shows, however, that the correlations between immature defenses and the importance attributed to coitus are independent of age.

### **1.3. Objectives**

The study of the links between defense mechanisms and sexuality needs to be further documented (a) by questioning not sexual behaviors *per se*, but what motivates their adoption and (b) by taking into account covariates likely to impact the results in order to highlight the specific links existing between defensive functioning and sexuality. By studying the relationships between defensive functioning and sexual motivations, our contribution meets these objectives. We assume:

- The existence of significant relationships between defensive functioning and sexual motivations.
- That these relationships are independent of age, gender or number of sexual partners, covariates of the sexual mechanisms and/or motivations mentioned in the literature.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Participants**

Subjects were recruited using methods inspired by snowball sampling techniques (Heckathorn 1997) whose relevance has already been highlighted in studies dealing with issues related to sexuality (Pascoal et al. 2014). E-mails were sent to acquaintances, colleagues and students by the principal investigator. They invited subjects to participate in the study and directed them to a free and informed consent form created from the one proposed by the Comité d'Ethique de la Recherche avec des êtres humains de l'Université de Laval (CERUL: <https://www.cerul.ulaval.ca/cms/site/cerul>). The survey was conducted online using Lime-Survey software. Anonymity was ensured at all stages of data collection. Responses were stored on a secure university server. Online data collection offers good psychometric qualities (Meade et al. 2007; De Beuckelaer et Lievens 2009; Brock et al. 2012). In addition, it offers a greater sense of confidentiality and perceived anonymity than traditional investigative methods (Naus et al. 2009). Therefore, it seemed relevant to us in the context of this study into sexual behavior. Complete data for 295 subjects were collected (241 females, 54 males;



mean age: 23.26 years, sd = 6.18, range: 18 - 53 years, mean number of reported sexual partners: 6.22, sd = 8.25, range: 1 - 72).

## **2.2. Measures**

Defensive functioning was evaluated using the Defense Style Questionnaire in its 28-item version (DSQ28, Saint Martin, Valls, Rousseau, Callahan, & Chabrol, 2013). Abbreviated version of the DSQ40 (Andrews et al. 1993), the DSQ28 consists of items presented in the form of proposals to explore the behavioral manifestations of defense mechanisms in specific situations (Soultanian et al. 2005). Participants indicate their level of agreement with the proposals on a nine-point Lickert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 9 (strongly agree). The first steps of the French validation of the DSQ28 led to the identification of 5 defensive styles (Immature, Mature, Autistic, Neurotic, Denial, cf. Saint Martin et al. 2013). The Cronbach alpha in this research was  $\alpha = .64$ , similar to what is found in the literature (Laconi et al. 2017).

Sexual motivations were assessed using the French translation of the Reason for Having Sex Questionnaire or YSEX (Meston et Buss 2007; Gouvernet et al. 2017). This questionnaire, the most exhaustive to date (Hatfield et al. 2012), lists 140 reasons that may lead to the adoption of sexual behaviors. Subjects indicate how often each motivation led them to have sex on a five-point scale (1: None of my sexual experiences; 5: All of my sexual experiences). The analysis of the factorial structure of the YSEX led to the identification of 4 general dimensions (physical reasons, goal attainment, emotional reasons, insecurity) and 13 sub-dimensions (reduction of stress, pleasure, desire, search for experiences, acquisition of resources, social enhancement, revenge, utility, love and commitment, emotional expression, self-esteem, pressure and obligation, keeping one's partner). In this research, the internal consistency of the questionnaire was good ( $\alpha > .90$ ).

### **2.3. Data processing**

Data were processed using the R software (<https://cran.r-project.org/>) and the Psych package (Revelle 2011). The examination of the data distribution led us to favor non-parametric analyses due to the presence of atypical data and doubts regarding the normality of the distributions (skewness & kurtose below or beyond the range [-2; +2]). Robust multiple regression analyses (McKean et Hettmansperger 2016) were conducted using the Rfit package (Kloke et McKean 2012) for each of the categories of sexual motivation of the YSEX with defensive styles as predictors and age, gender (dummy coding) and number of sexual partners as covariates. The significance of the predictors (*p-value*) in each regression equation was adjusted using the False Discovery Rate method (Benjamini et Hochberg 1995). This method was also used to adjust the significance of the coefficients of determination  $r^2$  of the different models.

## **3. Results**

### **3.1. Descriptive statistics**

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. With regard to the dimensions of the YSEX it appears that loving and physical motivations are those which lead most frequently to sexual relations. Examination of the sub-dimensions of the YSEX confirms this point: pleasure and love are the sub-dimensions that most often lead our subjects to sexual intercourse. Experience seeking and desire are also among the strongest motivations. The least frequently mentioned motivations are those related to goal attainment (goal attainment, resource acquisition, social status). Concerning the DSQ28, the most important scores concern mature and neurotic defenses. On the other hand, autistic defenses are the most rarely mobilized.

**\*Insert Table 1\***

### **3.2. Correlations between defense mechanisms and age, sex and number of partners**

Spearman correlation analyses were conducted to examine the collinearity of the relationships between defensive styles and age, sex (dummy coded) and number of sexual partners. The results are presented in Table 2. It appears that the correlations are weak. It also appears that age is negatively correlated with immature, autistic and neurotic defenses. It would appear that women tend to mobilize fewer mature defenses and more immature and neurotic defenses, compared to men. Finally, the number of sexual partners is positively correlated with mature defenses and denial.

**\*Insert Table 2\***

### **3.3. Multiple regressions**

#### **3.3.1. Main dimensions of the YSEX**

We first conducted four regression analyses on the main dimensions of YSEX (see Table 3). The four models obtained explain from 7.5% to 23.2% of the variance in sexual motivations. Covariates explain from 1 to 14.6% of sexual motivations. The defense mechanisms contribute significantly to explain between 4.4% and 8.6% of the variations for the four models.

Age does not make a significant contribution to the models. The number of partners is positively associated with three of the four categories of sexual motivations. Considering gender, men have higher scores than women for two dimensions. Immature defense mechanisms are the main defenses related to sexual motives. They are positively associated with the four categories of sexual motivations.

**\*Insert Table 3\***

#### **3.3.2. YSEX sub-dimensions**

We conducted 13 regression analyses on the sub-dimensions of YSEX. Results are presented in Table 4. Models explain from 6.6% to 28.1% of the variance in sexual motivations. Nine out of 13 models can be explained by covariates alone. Covariates explain from 1 to 26% of the variations in sexual motivation scores. The covariate most frequently associated with sexual motivation is the number of sexual partners. The significant contributions of defense mechanisms to models concern 7 of the 13 models, ranging from 4.3% to 6.7%. For four models, the role played by defense mechanisms is predominant, covariates not providing significant information. Immature defenses are the most frequent defenses associated with sexual motives. Mature, autistic and neurotic defenses are each associated with only one category of motivation while denial is not associated with any sexual motivation. Whatever category of sexual motivation is considered, the link with defense mechanisms is positive. Finally, it should be noted that none of the sexual motivations are influenced by more than one defense.

**\*Insert Table 4\***

## **4. Discussion**

### **4.1. General remarks**

We found in this work a number of results similar to those in the literature. As suggested elsewhere (Meston et Buss 2007; Hatfield et al. 2012), it appears that sexual motivations are varied and cannot be reduced to the triad of "pleasure, relief, reproduction". Similarly, consistent with developmental theorizations of defense mechanisms (Vaillant 1993; Cramer 1999), significant links were found between age and defensive maturity.

We found significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) but of small amplitude ( $r < .30$ ) between male and female defensive functioning: women appear to mobilize more immature defenses than men

and less frequently mature defenses. It is unlikely that defensive maturity is intrinsically related to biological gender. Studies do show - but inconsistently (Chabrol et Callahan 2004) - differences in the types of defenses mobilized by men and women. However, overall defensive maturity is identical for men and women (Petraglia et al. 2009). One possible explanation for this result relates to the method of defense assessment used. Indeed, the link between defensive functioning and biological gender are particularly dependent on the tools used to identify defense mechanisms (Drapeau et al. 2011). However, the tool used here has only recently been developed (Saint Martin et al. 2013). Therefore, the results need to be supplemented with other measures of defensive functioning.

Another explanatory hypothesis can be formulated in regard to the questioning of the research: the subjects agreed to take part in research where the stated objectives concerned the links between psychological functioning and motivations for sexuality, i.e. the object of their desires. Because defensive mechanisms provide information about the nature and personal significance of threats encountered by subjects (Freud 1936; Vaillant 1993; Gouvernet et al. 2015b), it is possible that differences in defensive functioning mean that it is more difficult to address the object of one's desire as a woman than as a man. Research has shown that expressing one's desires can be a source of concern and anxiety for women (Tolman 1994; O'Sullivan et Vannier 2016). These worries and anxieties are said to be rooted in gender stereotypes whose links to defensive functioning have already been demonstrated (Mahalik et al. 1998). According to them, men should be sexually active and initiate sexual activity. Conversely, women should present themselves as reactive and passive in sexuality (Kreager et Staff 2009; Emmerink et al. 2016), being objects in the service of male desire rather than actors of their own desires (Fredrickson et Roberts 1997). By questioning the object of desire, this research would have led to the questioning of these internalized stereotypes. As such, it could be experienced, unconsciously, as an attack of the Self, one of the main reasons for the

activation of defense mechanisms (Cramer 2006). Because gender stereotypes can have a negative impact on sexual health, it would be interesting to study whether getting women to think about their sexual motivations could have a medium- to long-term effect on their sexual health through an inflection of gender stereotypes.

## **4.2. Contributions of defense mechanisms to the study of sexual motivations**

### **4.2.1. Significant contributions...**

The literature is mainly focused on the study of differences in sexual motivations as a function of socio-demographic variables (Hatfield et al. 2012). However, this work shows that defense mechanisms help explain an additional percentage of variance compared to models involving only socio-demographic variables such as age and gender. Considering that the development of defense mechanisms depends on the developmental history of the subjects, this result reminds us that life history contributes to giving meaning to sexual behavior, to its shaping and orientation.

This is not the first work questioning the correlations between dispositional variables and sexual motivations. Existing works, however, have focused primarily on the relationships between sexual motivations and broad dimensions of personality or attachment patterns (Meston et Buss 2007; Gouvernet et al. 2015a). However, defense mechanisms and personality dimensions, although associated, cannot be assimilated to each other (Perry et al. 1998). The question then arises as to whether the variance explained by the defense mechanisms is specific to them or whether it is redundant with that which the other personality dimensions might have. The combined use of attachment scales, big-five inventories, and defense mechanism assessment tools, combined with multiple regression analyses or partial correlations, may be relevant in future investigations to determine the respective contributions of personality dimensions and defense mechanisms to explain sexual motivations. Defense mechanisms and attachment styles are both transactional processes that

focus on emotional and inter-individual regulation (Prunas et al. 2019). Recent literature suggests that they can be considered sequentially: defense mechanisms may mediate the relation between attachment styles and psychological and behavioral outcomes (Ciocca et al. 2020). Future work may attempt to explore this potential mediating role within the framework of sexual motivations.

#### **4.2.2. ... but modest contributions**

The additional variance explained by defense mechanisms, although significant, remains modest: between 4 and 8.6%. Moreover, not all defense mechanisms are equivalent. As found elsewhere in the literature dealing with the correlation between defense mechanisms and sexuality (Costa et Brody, 2013), immature defenses appear to be the main predictors, compared to other categories of defenses. They are most frequently associated with sexual motivations and these correlations are all positive. Following the proposals of Cooper and colleagues (Cooper et al. 1998, 2011), the hypothesis that immature psychological functioning leads to functional sexuality can be advanced. In the most defensively fragile subjects, sexuality could have a defensive value and/or would contribute to compensating for a defensive functioning failure as suggested by the significant correlations found between, on the one hand, immature defenses and, on the other hand, motivations driven by emotional expression or by love and commitment.

Compared to immature defenses, other defensive styles have few associations with sexual motives. When significant relationships exist, their overall intensity is lower. Future investigations are necessary to determine whether mature defenses minimize the use of functional sex or hinder the ability to consciously represent the functions and objectives pursued through sexual relations, as the psychoanalytic tradition might suggest (Freud 1894, 1936).

### **4.3. Defense mechanisms and regulation of interpersonal relationships**

When looking at the four main dimensions of the YSEX, significant links were found for both physical and emotional or relational motivations. These results are in line with the works highlighting the role played by defense mechanisms in stress management (Vaillant 1993; Cramer 2006). Defense mechanisms thus help explain more than 5% of the variability in the sexual motivation scores adopted in order to reduce stress. However, it should be noted that this result is mainly due to the effect of autistic defenses. The other defense categories do not contribute significantly to the model. The results also suggest that defense mechanisms are not limited to stress management modalities but should also be considered in their interindividual functions, as proposed elsewhere (Benjamin 1995; McAdams 1998).

### **4.4. Defense mechanisms: protective or risk factors?**

The impact of defense mechanisms on the management of interpersonal relationships seems essentially negative. In the literature, the role of defense mechanisms has long been debated as to their psychopathological significance. However, a consensus has emerged that only immature defenses are generally vectors of psychological dysfunctions, with mature defenses being beneficial and associated with positive psychological and behavioral outcomes (Chabrol et Callahan 2004; Cramer 2006; Gouvernet et al. 2015c). In this sense, we found relations between immature and neurotic defense mechanisms on the one hand and the adoption of sexual behaviors through feelings of insecurity on the other. More specifically, neurotic mechanisms contribute to a higher probability of sexual behavior by pressure and obligation, while immature defenses are positively associated with motivations to avoid relationship breakdown. These two categories of defense could therefore appear as factors of vulnerability for emotional and intimate life.

As in the study by Costa and Brody (Costa et Brody, 2013), we found that mature defenses are associated with an increased number of sexual partners. Several explanatory hypotheses



can be formulated. The first is in the field of developmental approaches to defense mechanisms (e.g. Cramer, 2006). Since mature defense mechanisms correlate with age, the correlation between this defensive style and the number of partners would ultimately only reflect the impact of age. This interpretation shows the need to take into account the potential impact of covariates such as age when analyzing the specific links between defense mechanisms and variables related to sexuality, as suggested by Potterat (2013). This result can also be compared with work highlighting the socially facilitating aspect of the most mature defense mechanisms (Benjamin 1995). By making their users attractive, the more mature defenses helped to increase opportunities to meet partners.

Considering that the multiplication of partners potentiates risky sexual behavior (Richter et al. 1993; Valois et al. 1999; Kan et al. 2010; Štulhofer et al. 2010; Upson et al. 2010), the positive link between the number of sexual partners and the use of the most mature defenses may seem paradoxical. It suggests that mature defense mechanisms can be risk factors for sexuality. However, research questioning the links between defense mechanisms and health behaviors shows that the most mature defenses generally contribute to the adoption of healthy behaviors. When the links between defensive functioning and risky sexual behavior are more specifically investigated, it appears that only immature defenses are positively correlated with condom use. There is no link to note concerning the most mature defenses (Costa & Brody, 2008). Thus, it is possible that mature defenses have a double impact on the links between many sexual partners and health behaviors:

- (i) an impact leading to the promotion of interindividual relations, thus allowing the consolidation of positive sexual patterns of Self, combined with
- (ii) a second impact which would moderate or attenuate the intensity of the relationship between plurality of partners and the development of risk behaviors for health.

This hypothesis requires further investigations questioning the mediating and moderating roles of defense mechanisms in the context of sexual behavior.

#### **4.5. Limitations of the study**

This work has limits. The first are the characteristics of the sample, which, like many studies dealing with sexual motivations (Hatfield et al. 2012; Gouvernet et al. 2016), is predominantly female. Even though the analysis of correlations between defensive styles and sexual motivations was conducted by controlling for gender impact, future research will require a more balanced ratio of men and women. Similarly, the methods of recruitment are questionable, even if the relevance of snowball sampling or online data collection methods in the context of research on intimate issues has been highlighted elsewhere (Meade et al. 2007; De Beuckelaer et Lievens 2009; Naus et al. 2009; Brock et al. 2012; Pascoal et al. 2014). Finally, the inherent limitations of the material used, i.e. questionnaires, must be mentioned. In order to overcome these possible biases, future investigations may propose clinical and qualitative evaluations of defense mechanisms based on interviews, which will also allow a more detailed evaluation of defensive functioning.

The present research does not allow us to interpret in terms of causal relationships. Longitudinal studies are necessary in order to study these hypotheses further. The study of the interaction effects between defense mechanisms and sexual motivations could also be relevant. Because defense mechanisms, like sexual motivations, can affect marital satisfaction (Ungerer et al. 1997; Impett et al. 2005), the study of the interactions between defenses and sexual motivations could, for example, allow a more detailed understanding of the couple's psychopathologies.

#### **5. Conclusion**

Elements for clinical care of persons with sexual disorders emerge from this work despite the above limitations. It has shown the importance of considering defensive functioning for the establishment of an optimal therapeutic alliance (Despland et al., 2001; Laconi et al., 2014). It is likely that psycho-sexological consultations investigating motivations for sexuality could benefit from a differential approach based on prior assessment of the defensive functioning encountered in order to best adapt clinical care to the individual. If defense mechanisms affect the way we perceive and feel reality (Chabrol et Callahan 2004; Gouvernet et al. 2015c), assessment of defensive functioning may also contribute to the investigation of sexual dysfunctions. These require an understanding of desire and, a fortiori, an understanding of the object of desire, which varies for everyone.

**Conflict of interest: None**

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<b>Variables</b>	<b>mean</b>	<b>sd</b>	<b>median</b>	<b>min</b>	<b>max</b>
<b>Covariates</b>					
• Gender	Female $n = 241$ ; Male : $n = 54$				
• Age	23,26	6,18	22	18	53
• Number of sexual partners	6,22	8,25	4	1	72
<b>YSEX</b>					
<i>Main Dimensions</i>					
• Physical	2,49	0,68	2,43	1,03	4,74
• Goal attainment	1,17	0,24	1,08	1	3,65
• Love	2,53	0,67	2,54	1	4,83
• Insecurity	1,57	0,45	1,49	1	4,22
<i>Sub-dimensions</i>					
• Stress reduction	1,87	0,71	1,75	1	4,67
• Pleasure	3,34	0,79	3,5	1	5
• Physical desire	2,36	0,91	2,3	1	5
• Experience seeking	2,4	0,8	2,33	1	4,8
• Ressources	1,06	0,15	1	1	2,6
• Social status	1,15	0,28	1	1	2,73
• Revenge	1,2	0,38	1	1	4,78
• Utilitary	1,26	0,39	1,1	1	4,6
• Love and commitment	3,1	0,82	3,17	1	4,92
• Emotional expression	1,96	0,73	1,86	1	5
• Self-esteem boost	1,84	0,64	1,78	1	4,67
• Duty and pressures	1,39	0,48	1,23	1	4
• Mate guarding	1,48	0,54	1,33	1	4,22
<b>DSQ28</b>					
• Immature defensive style	4,18	1,13	4,11	1,78	7,44
• Mature defensive style	5,72	1,02	5,78	2,67	8,33
• Autistic fantasy	3,74	1,84	3,33	1	9
• Neurotic defenses	4,67	1,42	4,75	1	8
• Denial	3,55	1,34	3,33	1	7,33

Table 1 – Descriptives statistics.

	Age	Gender (F : 0, M : 1)	Number of sexual Partners
Immature defenses	-.148*	-.125*	.006
Mature defenses	.001	.133*	.116*
Autistic fantasy	-.144*	.077	-.073
Neurotic defenses	-.146*	-.138*	-.035
Denial	.016	.078	.129*

Table 2 – Correlations between predictors. Note : \* :  $p < .05$

	Physical Reasons	Goal Attainment	Emotional Reasons	Insecurity
<b>Intercept</b>	<b>5.753***</b>	<b>3.33***</b>	<b>3.657***</b>	<b>3.189***</b>
<b>Covariates</b>				
• Age	-.053	0	-.02	.008
• Gender (0 : F ; 1 : M)	<b>1.523***</b>	<b>.243**</b>	.126	.054
• Number of sexual Partners	<b>.072***</b>	<b>.021***</b>	-.004	<b>.024*</b>
<b>Defenses</b>				
• Immature defenses	<b>.413**</b>	<b>.07*</b>	<b>.313***</b>	<b>.199**</b>
• Mature defenses	.284	.019	.103	-.125
• Autistic fantasy	.073	<b>.035*</b>	-.002	.064
• Neurotic defenses	-.074	-.002	-.012	<b>.132*</b>
• Denial	-.034	<b>.041*</b>	-.016	-.028
<b>Model's statistics</b>				
• Robust R <sup>2</sup> Global model [1]	<b>.142***</b>	<b>.232***</b>	<b>.075**</b>	<b>.10***</b>
• Robust R <sup>2</sup> model without defenses [2]	<b>.098***</b>	<b>.146***</b>	.01	.02
• ΔR <sup>2</sup> : R <sup>2</sup> model_1 - R <sup>2</sup> model_2	<b>.044*</b>	<b>.086***</b>	<b>.065***</b>	<b>.08***</b>

Table 03 – Robust multiple regression analysis: main dimensions of the YSEX. Note: Unstandardized coefficients; p-value are adjusted (FDR algorithm). \*: p<.05; \*\*: p<.01; \*\*\*: p<.001

	Stress reduct.	Pleasure	Physical Desirab	Expe. Seeking	Resource	Social Status	Revenge	Utilitar.	Love and Commit.	Emotion. Express	Self-Esteem Boost	Duty and Pressure	Mate Guard.
Intercept	.677*	2.415***	.816	1.46**	.773***	.730***	.906***	.861***	2.478***	1.164**	1.428***	.817**	1.052**
<b>Covariates</b>													
• Age	-.003	-.016	-.007	-.013	.007***	0	.001	-.003	-.011	-.01	.001	.002	.001
• Gender (0 : F ; 1 : M)	.383***	.267	.591**	.308*	.008	.204***	.03	.073	.009	.08	-.09	.115	.033
• Number of sexual Partners	.016***	.013	.02*	.019**	.005***	.007***	.008***	.009***	-.01	.006	.012**	.006	.006
<b>Defenses</b>													
• Immature defenses	.054	.079	.175*	.112*	.008*	.008	.004	.024	.162**	.157**	.06	.033	.077*
• Mature defenses	.007	.166**	.05	.077	.004	.005	-.001	.008	.059	.011	-.018	-.037	-.06
• Autistic fantasy	.046*	.022	-.048	.038	.001	.013	.003	.011	-.017	.026	.025	.014	.003
• Neurotic defenses	.025	-.041	-.011	-.045	.001	-.008	.001	.004	.008	.011	.026	.05***	.045
• Denial	-.01	-.05	-.007	-.041	.002	0	.006	.002	-.008	-.013	-.017	-.001	-.011
<b>Model's statistics</b>													
• Robust R <sup>2</sup> Global model [1]	.169***	.091**	.097***	.118***	.281***	.146***	.177***	.103***	.066*	.077**	.083***	.071**	.072**
• Robust R <sup>2</sup> model without defenses [2]	.115***	.034*	.061***	.075***	.262***	.166***	.191***	.109***	.02	.01	.048**	.013	.006
• $\Delta R^2 : R^2_{\text{model}_1} - R^2_{\text{model}_2}$	.054*	.057*	.036	.043*	.019	-.02	-.014	-.006	.046*	.067**	.035	.058*	.066*

Table 04 – Robust multiple regression analysis: sub-dimension of the YSEX. Note: Unstandardized coefficients. P-value are adjusted (FDR algorithm). \*: p<.05; \*\*: p<.01; \*\*\*: p<.001