

Romantic attachment and motivation for sex in emerging adulthood: Do gender and self-esteem matter?

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Background

- Romantic attachment shapes sexual behavior and its motivation in adult relationships (Davis, Shaver, & Vernon, 2004). Although attachment theory does not propose different motivational dynamics for men and women, sexual behavior is still gender specific because of both biological and cultural factors (for details see Petersen & Hyde, 2010). In addition, previous studies have demonstrated that self-esteem is also partially associated with sexual behavior. For example, self-esteem, regardless of pubertal status, predicted coitus transition differentially in boys and girls (Spencer, Zimet, Aalsma, & Orr, 2002).
- Sexual behavior is motivated by different goals or needs (appetitive/approach or aversive/avoidance motives in general). There is evidence that people with high attachment avoidance reported having sex as an attempt to make an impression to their peers, whereas those with high attachment anxiety using sex to decrease their feeling of relationship insecurity (Schachner & Shaver, 2004).
- Next, attachment anxiety was positively related to a whole range of sexual motives, with the exception of physical pleasure; avoidance is positively connected with manipulative use of sex and negatively related to emotional closeness and reassurance as a goals of sex (Davis, Shaver, & Vernon, 2004).
- Davis and his colleagues (2004) proposed that attachment anxiety is related to self-esteem enhancement motive for sex (measured as enhancement of sexual self-esteem). Role of global self-esteem is unclear in sexual motivation context.

The aim of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine the relation between attachment and sexual motivation taking into account the roles of global self-esteem and gender in emerging adults.

Method

Sample comprises **581 Czech emerging adults** (96 male, mean age=22.72; SD=1.29) who are currently in a relationship and participate in a 5-years longitudinal study **Paths to adulthood**. Data used here come from the 5th wave of the study carried out in summer 2014.

Romantic attachment - Experiences in Close Relationships-Relationships Structures (Fraley et al. 2011); 6 items *attachment avoidance* ($\alpha=.87$) and 3 items *anxiety* ($\alpha=.87$).

Global self-esteem - Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (Rosenberg, et al. 1995); 7 items ($\alpha=.89$).

Motives for having sex - Perceived Locus of Causality for Sex Scale (Jenkins, 2004); 12 items *intrinsic* ($\alpha=.91$), 9 items *extrinsic* ($\alpha=.89$), 7 items *expression of intimacy* ($\alpha=.88$), 4 items *self-enhancement* ($\alpha=.81$), and 4 items *identified motives* ($\alpha=.79$).

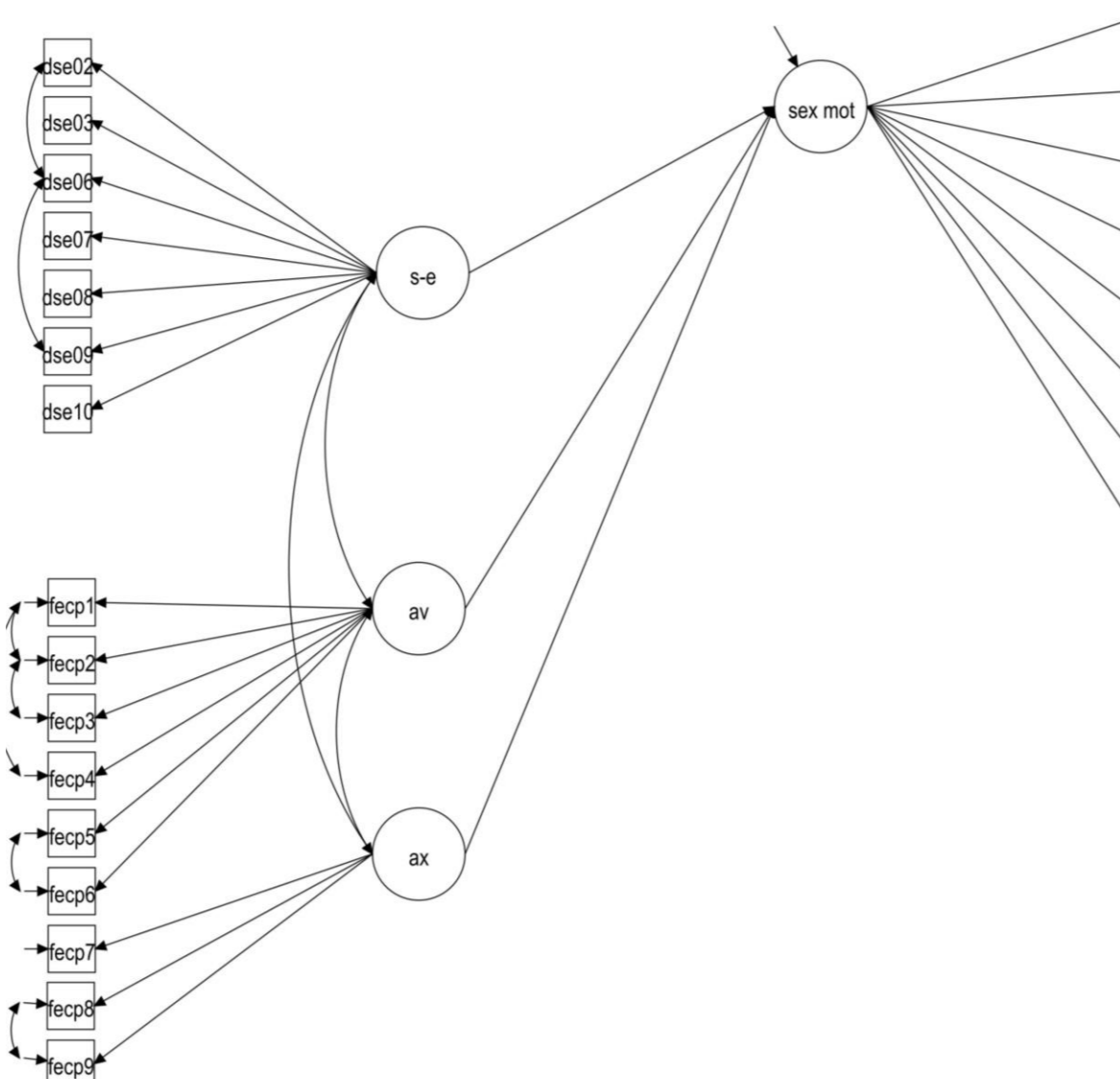
Descriptives

	Females			Males										
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	AV	AX	S-E	SM1	SM2	SM3	SM4	SM5
ECR-R AVOIDance	433	1.79	.90	88	2.22	.97	.16	-.15	-.12	.24	-.33	.11	-.11	
ECR-R AnXieTy	433	2.41	1.40	88	2.46	1.32	.32	-.33	.23	.33	.16	.20	.24	
Self-Esteem	414	3.08	.59	85	3.13	.59	-.18	-.32	-.13	-.13	-.02	-.19	-.15	
SexMot1	451	3.30	.77	90	3.56	.75	-.12	-.04	.14	.04	.41	.57	.67	
SexMot2	452	1.75	.71	90	1.77	.59	.18	.24	-.25	-.29	-.05	.36	.08	
SexMot3	452	3.94	.79	90	3.88	.83	-.28	-.09	.18	.50	-.33	.17	.52	
SexMot4	451	1.84	.81	90	2.18	.89	.04	.15	-.03	.51	.11	.26	.45	
SexMot5	456	3.34	.88	90	3.60	.98	-.10	.04	.10	.62	-.02	.42	.46	

Females below diagonal, males above diagonal

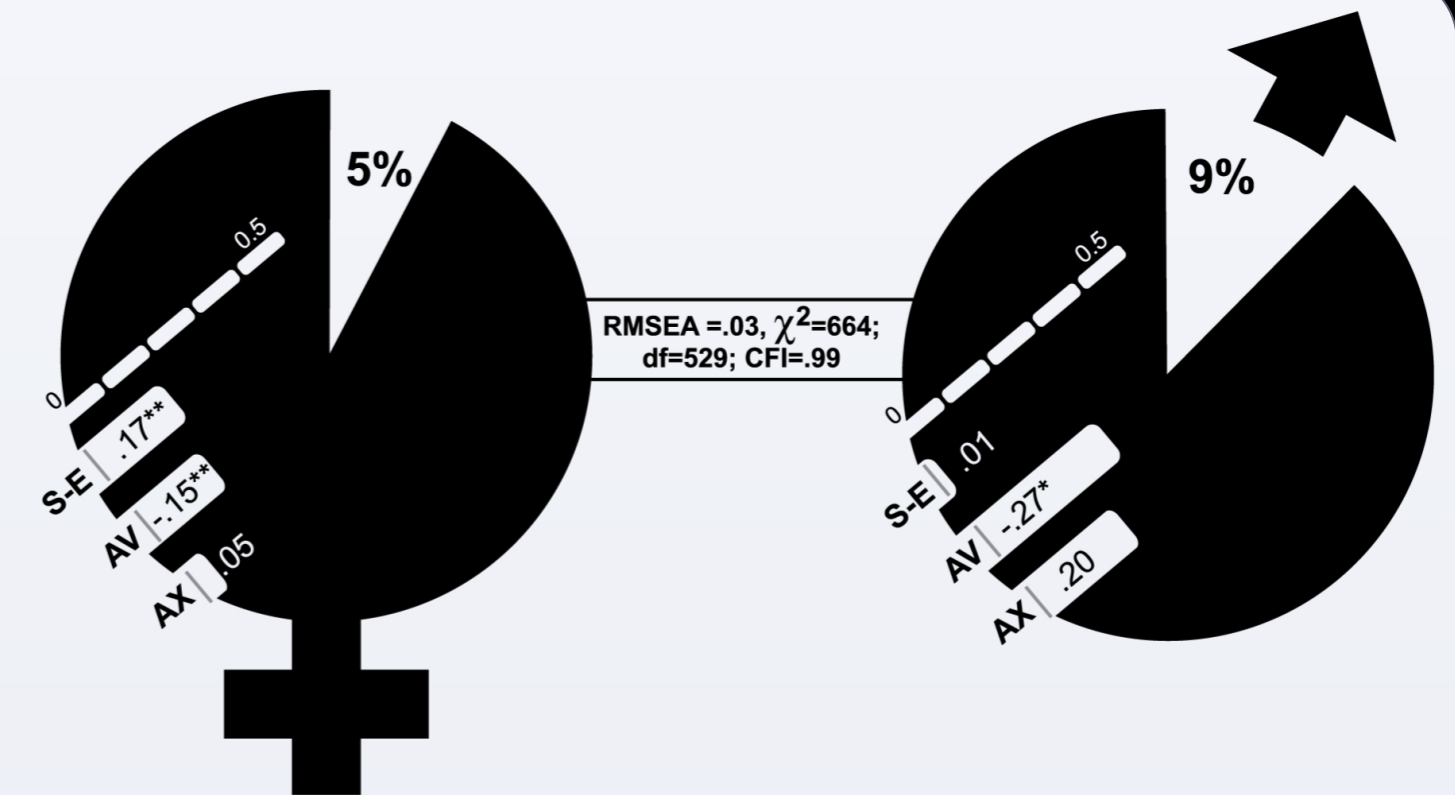
About the SEM models

- Five structurally equivalent multigroup models (by gender) were estimated in Mplus 7 – one model for each sex motivation.
- Measurement part fixed across groups, structural part free.
- S-E and sex motivation items analyzed as categorical – WLSMV was used as the estimator.
- Pictograms on the right show standardized structural coefficients for S-E, AV, and AX and explained variance in SM.



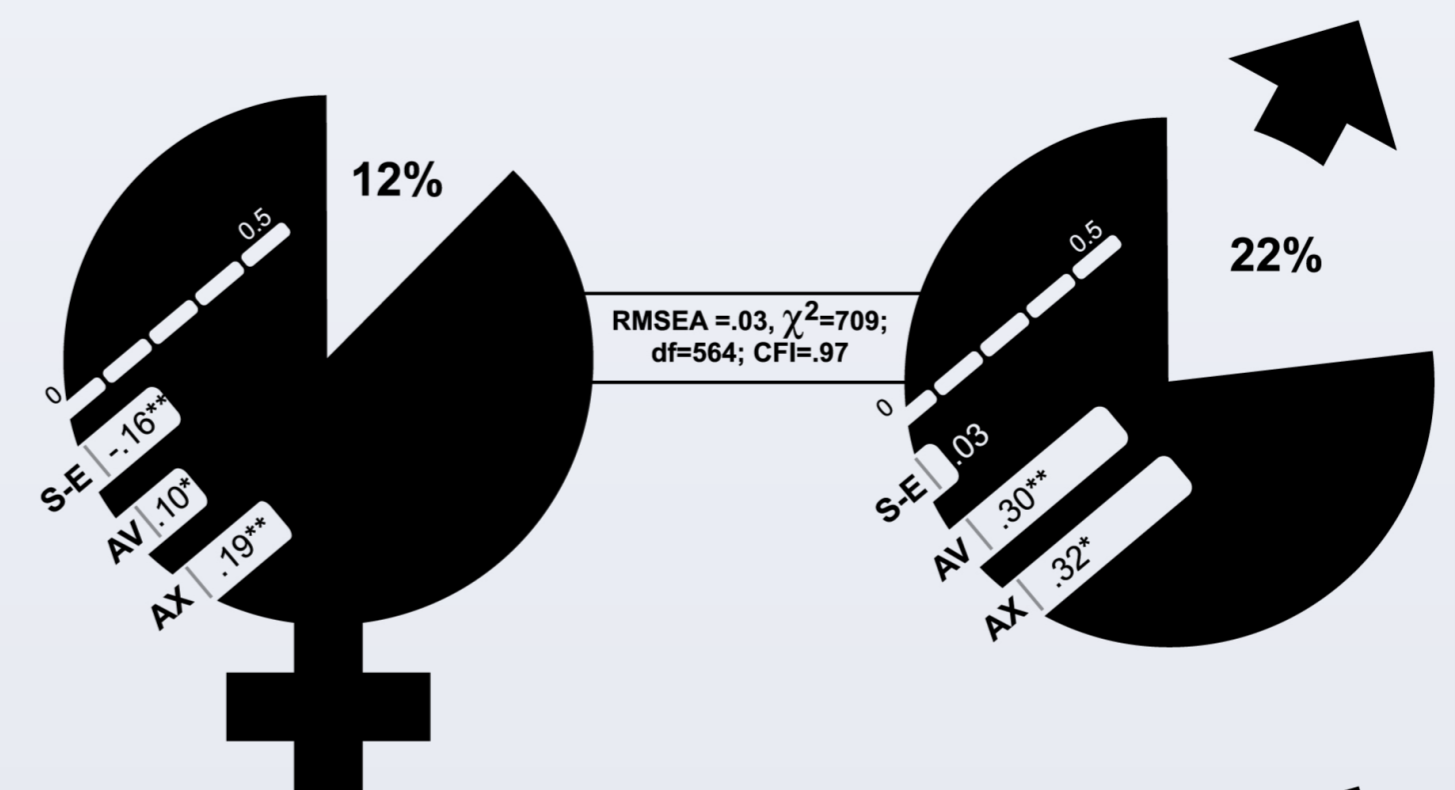
Motivation for sex 1 Sex feels good

intrinsic, internal appetitive motive
e.g. *Because I feel it is stimulating and enjoyable.*



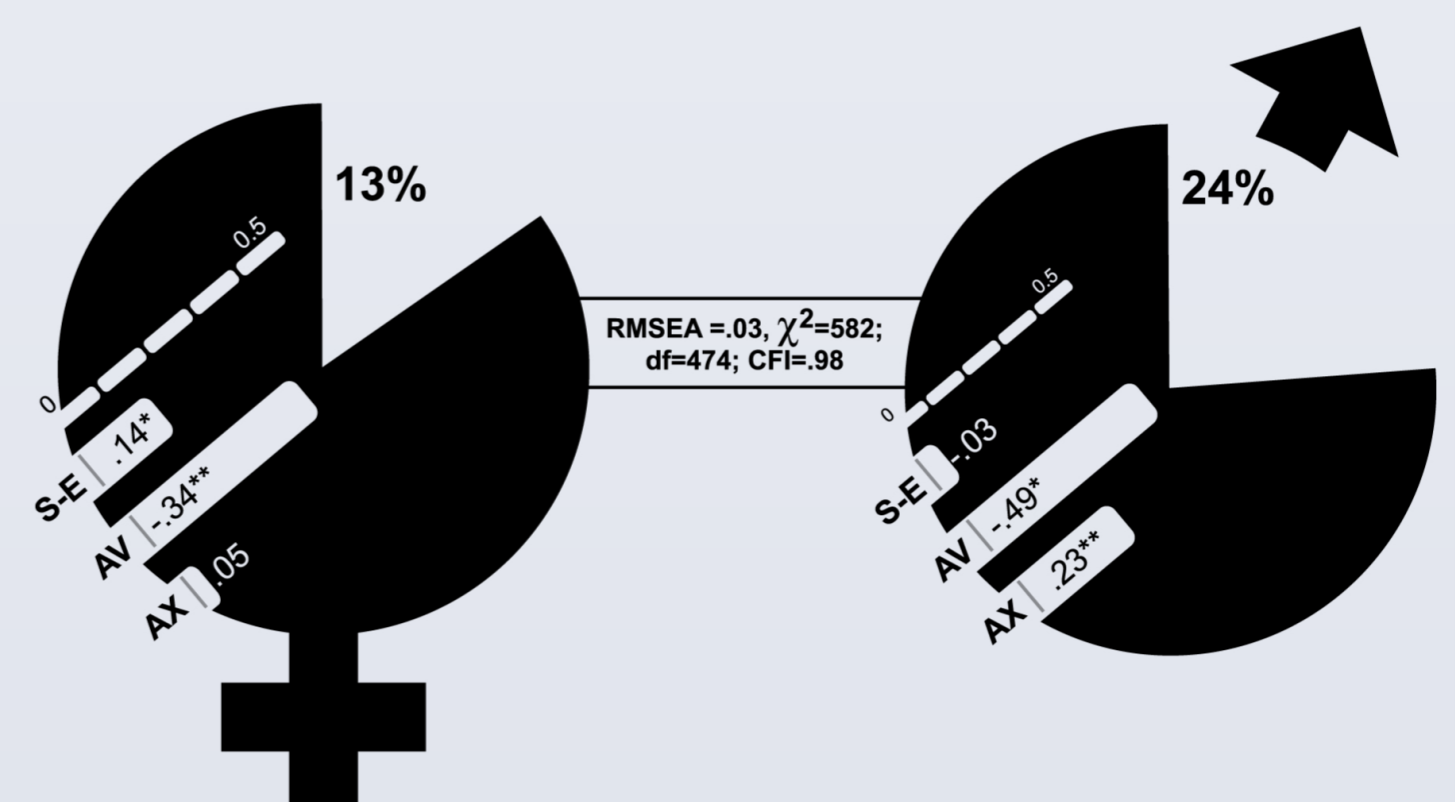
Motivation for sex 2 Sex is a sacrifice to my partner

extrinsic, social aversive motive
e.g. *Because I feel anxious or guilty if I don't go along.*



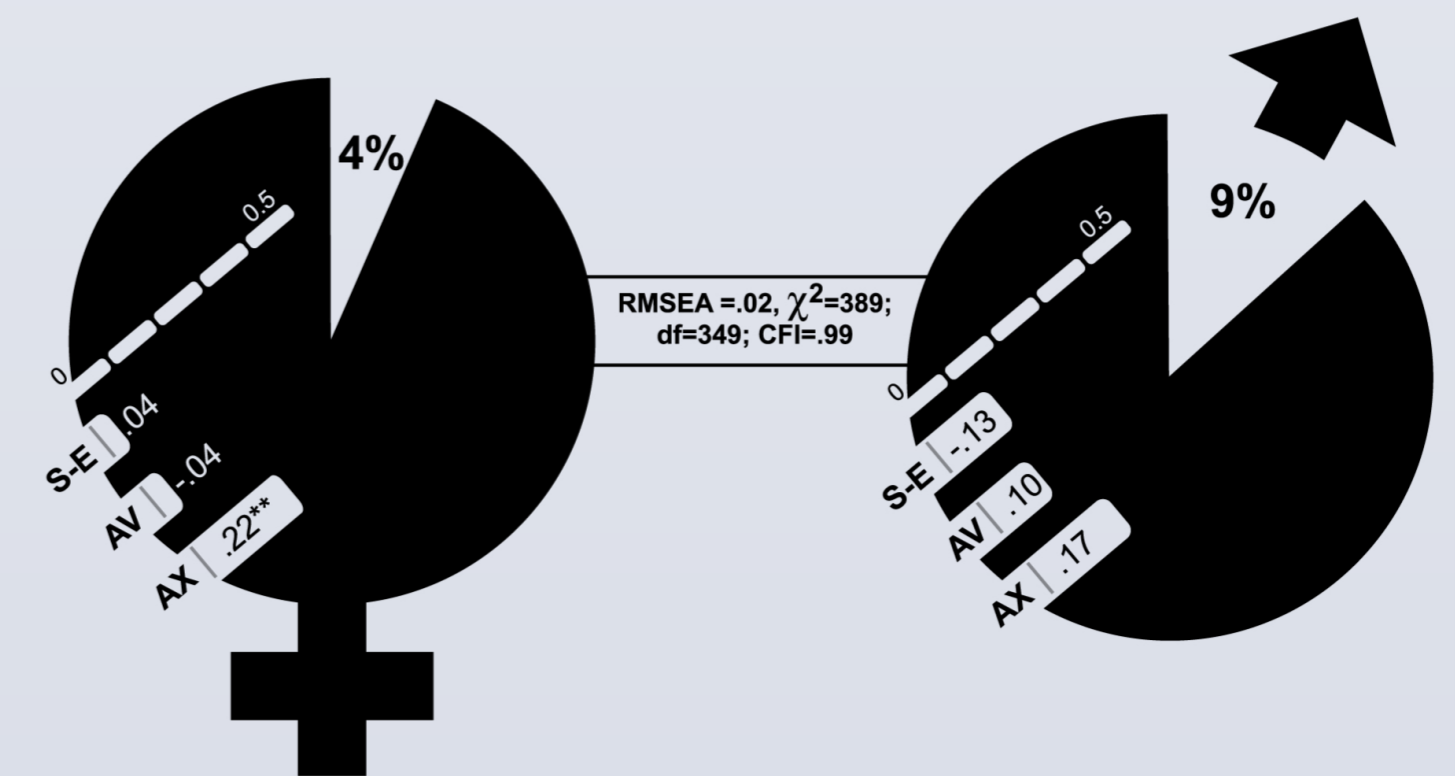
Motivation for sex 3 Sex is the expression of intimacy

social appetitive motive
e.g. *For the pleasure of sharing a special and intimate experience.*



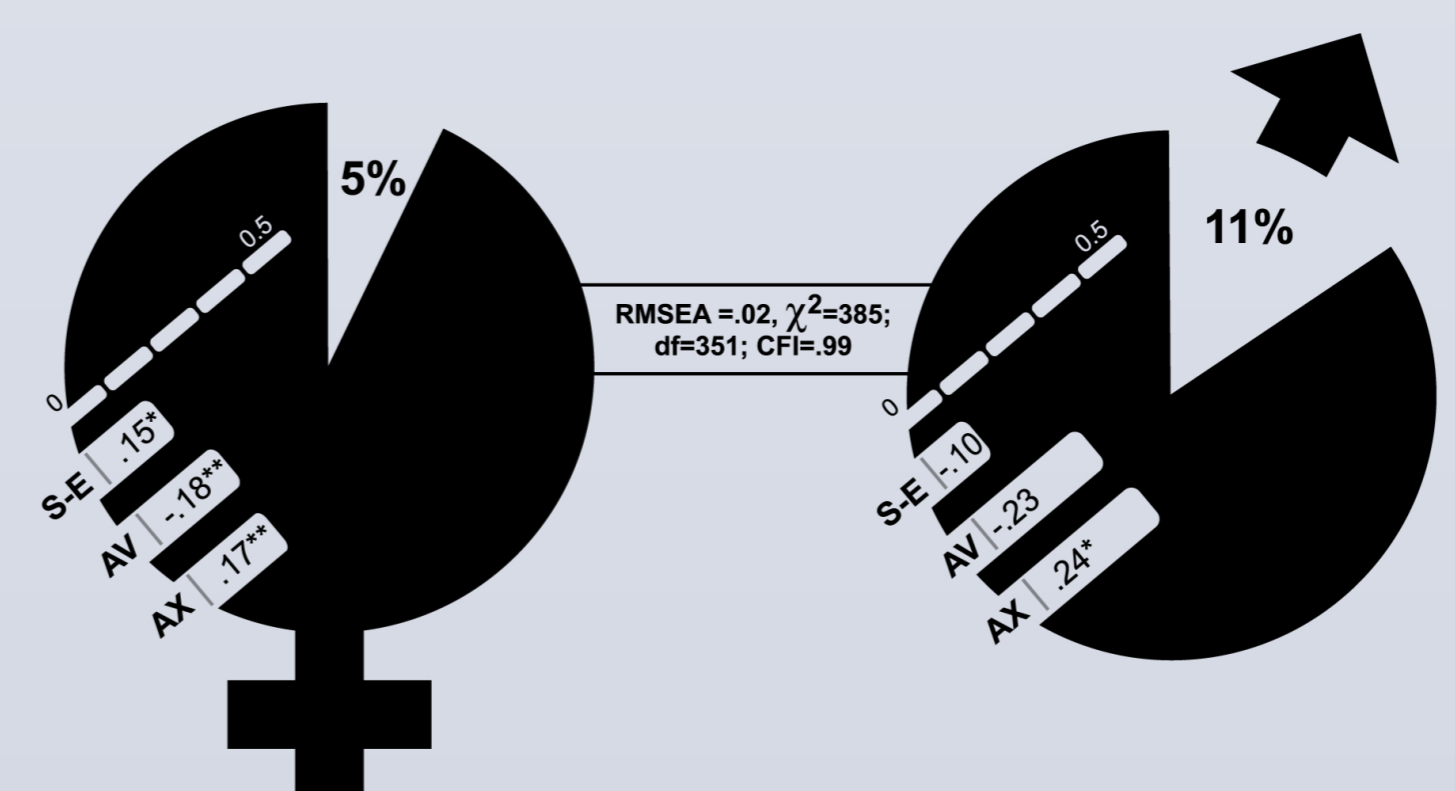
Motivation for sex 4 Sex makes me feel better

self-enhancement motive
e.g. *Because I think sex makes me feel better about myself.*



Motivation for sex 5 Sex is good in general

identified motive
e.g. *Because I see sex as a healthy activity.*



Conclusions

- Both attachment dimensions and global self-esteem are weakly associated with different motivations to have sex with different pattern of relationships form males and females.
- Males' motivations to have sex do not seem to be related to their self-esteem. In females, higher self-esteem slightly increases intrinsic motivations and decreases extrinsic motivation.
- Attachment dimensions seem to affect males' motivation to have sex more than females' motivation. However, especially here the question of the direction of causality comes to mind.