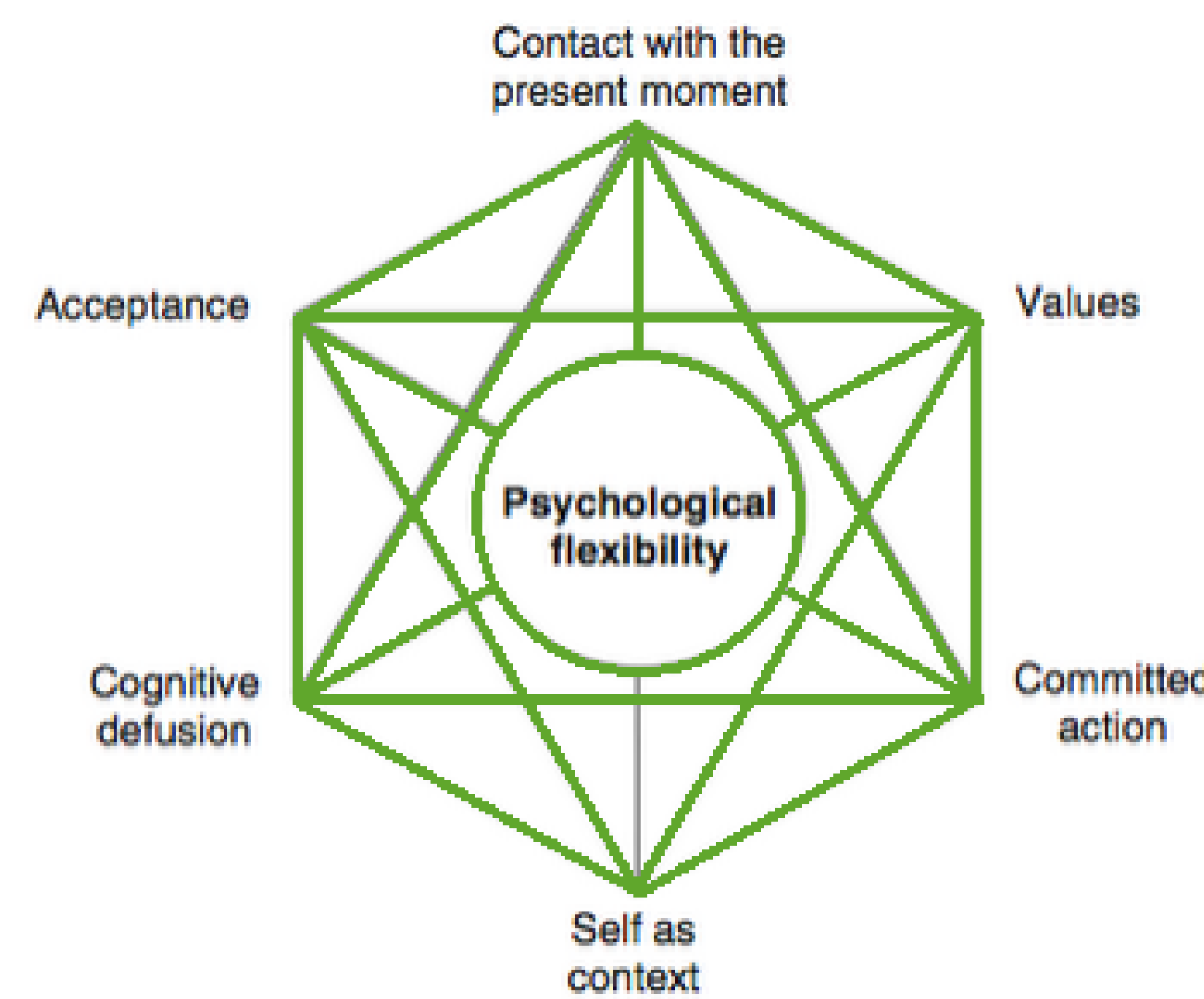


# Psychological flexibility and dyadic adjustment: The mediating role of communication

## INTRODUCTION

### ACT

- ACT focuses on the improvement of **psychological flexibility**, the ability to take action in the direction of one's personal values, despite the presence of unwanted thoughts and feelings (Dionne et al., 2013).
- Psychological flexibility results of the interaction of six underlying processes, grouped under 3 major axes :
  - ➔ **Openness:** The ability to **accept** unwanted thoughts/emotions and to **defuse** from one's thoughts.
  - ➔ **Centered:** The ability to be in contact with the **present moment** and to perceive oneself as the **context** of psychological events (rather than as concept).
  - ➔ **Engaged:** The ability to **act** in the direction of one's personal **values**.
- There is evidence that ACT is effective in the treatment of various disorders including anxiety, depression, chronic pain, substance abuse, psychotic symptoms, etc. (A-Tjak et al., 2015).
- Despite recent interest for couple counseling in the ACT clinical and research fields (Harris, 2009; Peterson, et al., 2009), few studies have shown interest in the relationship between **psychological flexibility and dyadic adjustment**.



### Dyadic adjustment

- **Unsatisfied and dysfunctional couple relationships are linked to numerous problematics**, negatively impacting partners' physical well-being and mental health (Whisman & Uebelacker, 2003) as well as compromising child development (Amato & Booth, 1997).
- A growing body of literature show the efficacy of couple therapies like the *Traditional Behavioral Couples Therapy* (Wright et al., 2008). However, **30 to 70%** of couples completing therapy do not maintain long-term improvements (Baucom et al., 1998).
- Recently, mindfulness and **acceptance based interventions** like the *Integrative Behavioral Couples Therapy* have become increasingly popular amongst therapists and have shown to be **effective** in improving relationship satisfaction, meanwhile better maintaining long-term improvements (Christensen et al., 2014; Jacobson et al., 2000).
- Also, a consensus is emerging in regards to the **major role played by mindfulness** in the prediction of relationship satisfaction (Kozlowski, 2013). Mindfulness allows couples to be more open and accepting towards unwanted thoughts and feelings, permitting partners to act in a positive manner despite the presence of difficult experiences (Wachs & Cordova, 2007).
- A recent study showed promising results when applying an ACT treatment procedure to distressed couples (Peterson et al., 2009). Indeed, while reducing partners' psychological and interpersonal distress, **ACT could prove to be useful in increasing relationship satisfaction**.

### Objectives

This study aims:

- 1) to **examine the contribution of psychological flexibility constructs** (acceptance, mindfulness, committed action) **in the prediction of relationship satisfaction**.
- 2) to test **the mediating effect of communication** in this relationship.

## METHOD

### PARTICIPANTS

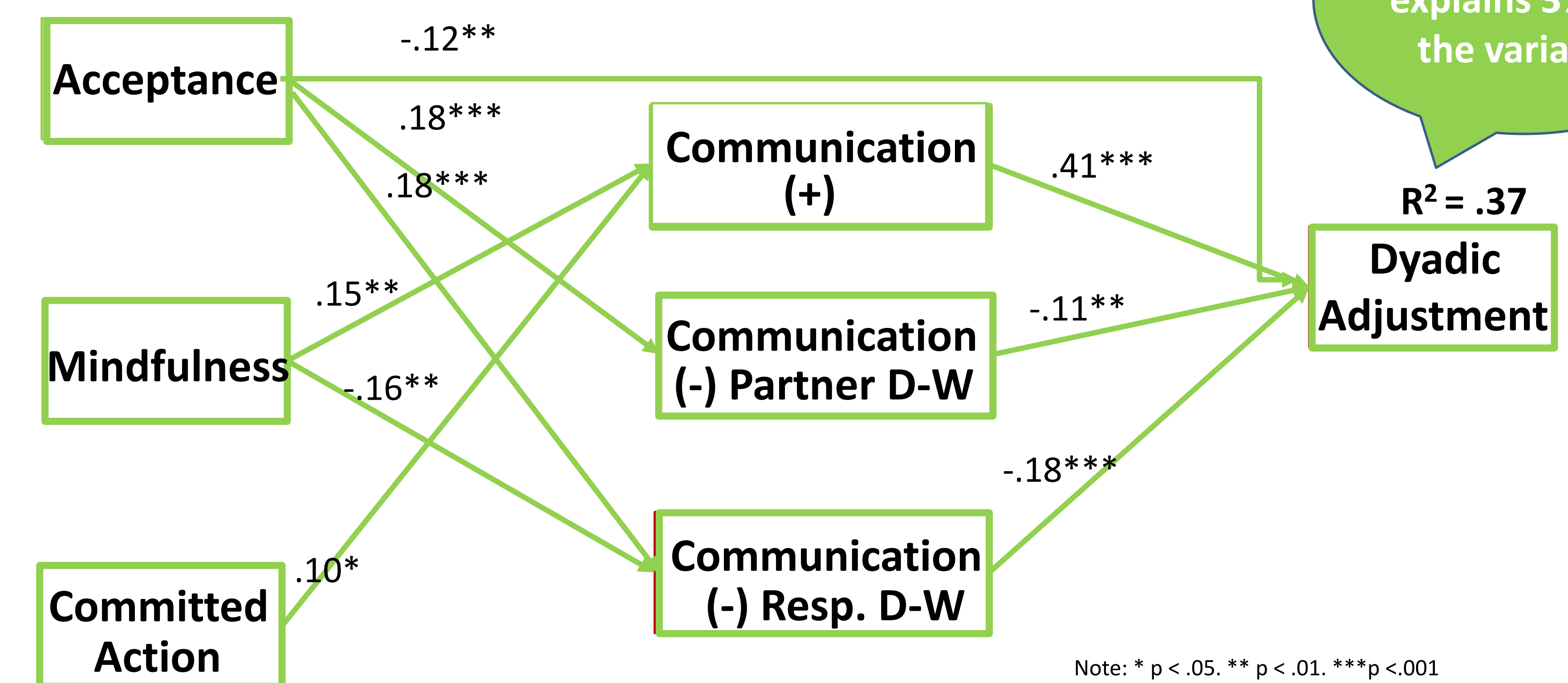
- ➔ **411** adults (16% male and 84% female)
- ➔ Mean age = 28,4 years
- ➔ Online survey

### MEASURES

- ➔ Acceptance (AAQ-II) : **7 items** (Monestès and al., 2009)..... $\alpha = .82$
- ➔ Mindfulness (MAAS) : **15 items** (Jermann and al., 2009)..... $\alpha = .84$
- ➔ Committed action (CAQ) : **8 items** (McCraken, 2014)..... $\alpha = .91$
- ➔ Dyadic adjustment (DAS-7) : **7 items** (Sabourin and al., 2005).... $\alpha = .88$
- ➔ Communication : **11 items** (Christensen, 1987)..... $\alpha = .84$

## RESULTS

Figure 1. Path analysis among psychological flexibility, communication, and dyadic adjustment



Note: \* p < .05. \*\* p < .01. \*\*\* p < .001

Table 1. Fit indices of the model

$\chi^2$	$\chi^2/DF$	RMSEA	CFI	TLI
12.95 P = .04	2.16	.053	.99	.95

## DISCUSSION

- **Results support our hypotheses and confirm the relationship** between psychological flexibility constructs (acceptance, mindfulness, committed action) and partners' relationship satisfaction through the mediating effect of communication.
- ➔ A **higher score of experiential avoidance** (non acceptance of unwanted thoughts or feelings) is directly linked to lower **dyadic adjustment**, as well as indirectly through the **negative communication pattern**.
- ➔ A **higher score on the mindfulness and committed action scales** are linked to **higher dyadic adjustment** through the **positive communication pattern**.
- ➔ The model **explains 37% of the dyadic adjustment variance** by taking into account the psychological flexibility constructs as well as the mediating role of communication.
- This study supports previous findings **demonstrating the relationship between different facets of the ACT model and couple satisfaction** (Kozlowski, 2013). The importance of mindfulness and acceptance should be **highlighted** in couple therapy as revealed by Christensen et al. (2004) and Jacobson et al. (2000).

### Limitations

- Given the cross-sectional nature of the study, caution should be made when interpreting the results concerning causality between variables.
- Our sample is composed of 80% female participants, which implies weaker external validity.
- Self-reported measures were used.

### Future Research

- Despite these limitations, this study confirms the relationships between ACT theory and couple satisfaction.
- This study allows better understanding of the relationship between psychological flexibility constructs and dyadic adjustment.
- In order to increase support for ACT in couple therapy, it will be important to further test this theory at a clinical level, using distressed couples and control groups.