

Emotional Intelligence and Intimacy in Relationships

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ABSTRACT

Emotional Intelligence is the ability to understand, manage one's own and other's feelings in order to adapt to the demands of the environment. Intimacy refers to the feelings of closeness and bondedness in close relationships. Emotional Intelligence help enhance intimacy by open expression of emotions and empathetic response to the partner's self-disclosure. The study examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and intimacy in 108 young adults currently in a heterosexual romantic relationship, belonging to the age group of 20-35 years (M=24.1 years, SD= 3.23 years) consisting of 36 (30%) males and 72 (70%) females. The study employed three scales namely Sternberg's Love Triangular Scale (1988), Schutte Emotional Intelligence Scale (1998) and Intimacy Attitude Scale Revised (1985). Data was collected through Google forms by emailing the questionnaire to the participants known to be in relationship through common friends and also by personally giving the questionnaire to students of universities in Delhi, NCR region. Positive correlation was found between Attitude towards intimacy and emotional intelligence; commitment and managing owns emotions subscale of emotional intelligence; attitude towards intimacy and managing other's emotions subscale of emotional intelligence. Thus emotionally intelligent individuals have a greater desire towards intimacy and commitment in their relationships.

Keywords: *Intimacy, Emotional Intelligence, Relationships*

Couples who have low emotional intelligence tend to have negative relationship quality, more conflict and less support in their relationship (Brackett et al., 2005). Due to the changing societal demands and work life balance, there is a growing concern among couples regarding their relationship quality and contentment with their partners. The current research aims to understand the relationship between emotional intelligence and intimacy in heterosexual romantic relationships and study the gender differences in intimacy and emotional intelligence

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Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

It is the process of understanding oneself and others, relating to people, and adapting to and coping with the immediate surroundings to be more successful in dealing with environmental demands (Bar-On, 1997).

Mayer and Salovey's conception of emotional intelligence proposes that emotional intelligence is comprised of two areas: experiential (ability to perceive, respond, and manipulate emotional information without necessarily understanding it) and strategic (ability to understand and manage emotions without necessarily perceiving feelings well or fully experiencing them).

The first branch, emotional perception, is the ability to correctly understand emotions .The second branch, use of emotions to facilitate thought, is the capacity of emotions to facilitate thinking The third branch, emotional understanding, is the ability to understand complex emotions (such as feeling two emotions at once) and the ability to recognize transitions from one to the other. Lastly, the fourth branch, emotion management, is the ability to connect or disconnect from an emotion depending on its usefulness in a given situation (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).Emotions are managed in the context of individual's life goals, self-knowledge and social awareness.

Intimacy

Intimacy is defined as feelings of closeness, connectedness, and bondedness in loving relationships, including those feelings that give rise to the experience of warmth in a loving relationship (Sternberg, 1986 p.119) It includes, self-disclosure ,emotional expression, trust ,support, physical expression, and a mutual experience of intimacy(Gaia ,2002).According to Sternberg(1986) other components of intimacy are desire to promote partner's wellbeing, being able to rely on each other in times of need, mutual understanding, comfort in sharing personal possessions with your partner, giving and receiving of emotional support and intimate communication with the loved ones.

Intimacy is an important factor in a couple relationship, its fulfilment leads to better adjustment and satisfaction in individuals and prevents them from facing distress and loneliness (Prager, 1995).hence intimacy helps in the promotion of individual wellbeing and health. It is a two way process which requires supportive and empathetic response from the partner with whom feelings and personal information is shared with. This makes disclosure feels validated and understood which strengthens the bond further. (Reis and Shaver, 1988).

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Self-disclosure facilitates the process of intimacy by making the partners feel emotionally close to each other leading to fulfilment of needs (Prager and Buhrmester 1998). It also makes the foundation of a new relationship stronger (Altman and Taylor 1973).

But Self Disclosure that contains more negative feelings and criticism can hurt the partner, harming the feelings of warmth and intimacy in the relationship. Discussing differences in a balanced way and working on negotiable compromises should be done.

Keltner and Haidt (2001) stated that the accuracy and depth of people's emotional understanding can help in decoding the intensions, attitudes, motivations and thoughts of others in their social surroundings. Poor understanding of emotions in self and others contributes to misinterpretation of verbal or nonverbal messages leading to tension and disruption of intimate relationships (Fitness, 2006). Thus understanding of emotions can contribute to greater intimacy between the couple.

Gender Differences in Intimacy

Cordova et al., (2005) in their study emotional skillfulness in marriage: intimacy as a mediator of the relationship between emotional skillfulness and marital satisfaction tested the theory that emotional skillfulness, specifically the ability to identify and communicate emotions, plays a role in the maintenance of marital adjustment through its effects on the intimacy process. Gender differences were found in the ability to communicate emotions and in the association between the communication of emotions and partners' marital adjustment.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND INTIMACY

The ability to successfully maintain, change or modify emotions, both in self and others contributes to relationship stability and happiness (fitness, 2001). Research suggests that couples capable of reframing negative interactions are higher in marital satisfaction. Zeidner et al., (2009) said that too much and too little of negative emotions may be maladaptive in interpersonal relationships. This can be understood in the context of self-disclosure which is a vital part of couple intimacy, where excess of negative self-disclosure can bring bitterness in the intimate relationship. People high on emotional intelligence know how to regulate their negative emotions and save their relationships from being impacted by them.

It is important in a relationship to notice and interpret one's own feelings in order to gain personal insight, to recognize that power lies within, by putting oneself in the right mood, one can bring out the best in others (Burnett, 1990). This indicates that emotional awareness plays a role in relationship satisfaction (Croyle & Waltz, 2002).

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Objectives

1. To study the relationship between emotional intelligence, intimacy, passion and commitment.
2. To study the relationship between emotional intelligence and attitude towards intimacy.
3. To study gender differences in intimacy, passion and commitment.
4. To study gender differences in emotional intelligence and attitude towards intimacy.

Hypotheses

1. There will be a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and its subscales, intimacy, commitment and passion.
2. There will be a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and its subscales and attitude towards intimacy
3. There will be significant difference between males and females on emotional intelligence
4. There will be significant difference between males and females on intimacy, commitment and passion.

METHODOLOGY

Sample/Participants

The sample consisted of a total of 108 young adults who were currently in a heterosexual romantic relationship. Out of 108 participants 36 (30%) were males and 72 (70%) were females. The age range was 20 to 35 years with mean ($M=24.1$ years, $SD= 3.23$ years).

Tools

1. Sternberg's Triangular Love Scale (Sternberg, 1988) is a 45 item scale that assesses three dimensions of love which are intimacy, passion and commitment. It is a 9 point rating scale with '1' indicating 'not at all' and 9 indicating 'extremely'. The reliability of the scale in current study is intimacy $\alpha=.94$, passion $\alpha=.93$ and commitment $\alpha=.95$
2. Intimate Attitude Scale Revised (Amidon, Kumar, Treadwell, 1985) is a 50 item scale that assess attitudes of closeness, intimacy, and trust that people have toward others and relationships with others. It is a 5 point rating scale with '1' indicating 'strongly disagree' and 5 indicating 'strongly agree'. The reliability of the scale in current study is $\alpha= .77$.
3. Emotional Intelligence Scale (Schutte, 1998) assesses four dimensions of emotional intelligence which are perception of emotions, managing own emotions, managing others emotions and utilization of emotions. The reliability of the scale in current study is $\alpha = .836$ and for dimensions are perception of emotions $\alpha=.65$, managing own emotions $\alpha =.63$, managing others emotions $\alpha =.61$ and utilization of emotions $\alpha =.629$

Data/Statistical Analysis: Correlation was employed to assess relationship between the constructs and subscale scores. t-test was employed to establish difference between groups with respect to the constructs under investigation.

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Procedure

Questionnaire booklets containing all the three measures and demographic details were given to students of Universities in Delhi NCR who were currently in a heterosexual romantic relationship and in the age group of 20 years and above. Participants were explained the aim of the current research and assured that the responses filled by them were only for the purpose of this research and would not be disclosed to anyone else. Instructions were given to the participants regarding how to mark the options in the rating scale depending on how close they feel to the statement mentioned in the questionnaire.

Responses were also collected online through Google forms. Participants for online data collection were selected through common friends who knew that the participants were in a heterosexual romantic relationship. Email ids of participants were taken from their friends and the link for the form was mailed to them along with the request to fill the questionnaire honestly, informing about the confidentiality of options marked and instructions on how to select the options according to the rating scale. It was ensure all the participants belonged to Delhi NCR region only and fall in the age bracket of 20-35

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The results were computed using SPSS 17.0 version. The missing value analysis was conducted for all items of the scales. The missing values were random and under 5%, hence the missing values were replaced with series mean.

Correlation

Table 1: Correlation between Intimacy, Passion, Commitment, Emotional Intelligence and attitude towards intimacy

	Intimacy	Passion	Commitment	Perception of Emotions	Managing Own Emotions	Managing Others Emotion	Utilization of Emotions	Emotional Intelligence	Attitude Towards Intimacy
Intimacy	1								
Passion	.87**	1							
Commitment	.80**	.77**	1						
Perception of Emotions	.08	.01	-.07	1					
Managing Own Emotions	.15	.14	.20*	.45**	1				
Managing Others Emotions	.09	.06	.03	.44**	.47**	1			
Utilization of Emotions	-.05	-.01	-.03	.43**	.38**	.39**	1		
Emotional Intelligence	.09	.09	.04	.80**	.79**	.74**	.67**	1	
Attitude Towards Intimacy	.27**	.230*	.21*	.13	.17	.30**	.01	.21*	1

*Note: N= 108, **p <0.01 and *p<0.05 (two-tailed)*

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Table 1 indicates that passion was positively correlated with intimacy, ($r(106) = .87, p < 0.01$), commitment was positively correlated with intimacy ($r(106) = .80, p < 0.01$) and passion ($r(106) = .77, p < 0.01$). Perception of emotions was not correlated with intimacy ($r(106) = .08, p = .421$), passion ($r(106) = .01, p = .312$), commitment ($r(106) = -.07, p = .468$). Similarly managing own emotions was not correlated with intimacy ($r(106) = .15, p = .132$) and passion ($r(106) = .14, p = .165$). Although it was found that managing own emotions positively correlated with commitment, ($r(106) = .20, p < 0.05$) and perception of emotions, ($r(106) = .45, p < 0.01$). Managing others emotions was not correlated with intimacy ($r(106) = .09, p = .335$), passion ($r(106) = .06, p = .546$), commitment ($r(106) = .03, p = .755$). Although it was found that managing others emotions positively correlated with perception of emotions, ($r(106) = .44, p < 0.01$) and managing own emotions ($r(106) = .47, p < 0.01$).

Utilization of emotions was not correlated with intimacy ($r(106) = -.05, p = .63$), passion ($r(106) = -.01, p = .916$), commitment ($r(106) = -.03, p = .741$). Although it was found that utilization of emotions positively correlated with perception of emotions, ($r(106) = .43, p < 0.01$), managing own emotions ($r(106) = .38, p < 0.01$) and managing others emotions ($r(106) = .39, p < 0.01$).

Emotional intelligence was not correlated with intimacy ($r(106) = .09, p = .361$), passion ($r(106) = .09, p = .340$), commitment ($r(106) = .04, p = .674$). Although it was found that emotional intelligence positively correlated with perception of emotions, ($r(106) = .80, p < 0.01$), managing own emotions ($r(106) = .79, p < 0.01$), managing others emotions ($r(106) = .74, p < 0.01$) and utilization of emotions ($r(106) = .67, p < 0.01$).

Attitude towards intimacy was positively correlated with intimacy ($r(106) = .27, p < 0.01$), passion ($r(106) = .23, p < 0.05$), commitment ($r(106) = .21, p < 0.05$), managing others emotions ($r(106) = .30, p < 0.01$) and emotional intelligence ($r(106) = .21, p < 0.05$). Although attitude towards intimacy was not correlated with perception of emotions ($r(106) = .13, p = .177$), managing own emotions ($r(106) = .17, p = .073$), utilization of emotions ($r(106) = .01, p = .90$).

Gender Differences

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation as per Gender distribution and Variables

Dependent Variable	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Emotional Intelligence	Male	36	130.82	12.54
	Female	72	132.44	12.89
Intimacy	Male	36	120.86	18.39
	Female	72	118.27	16.04
Passion	Male	36	114.81	19.80
	Female	72	112.64	18.32
Commitment	Male	36	123.89	13.94
	Female	72	120.07	18.99
Attitude Towards Intimacy	Male	36	159.41	14.70
	Female	72	160.04	18.08

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Table 3: t test results

Dependent Variable	t	df	Sig.(2tailed)
Emotional Intelligence	-.62	106	.54
Intimacy	.75	106	.45
Passion	.57	106	.57
Commitment	1.07	106	.29
Attitude Towards Intimacy	-.18	106	.86

There was no significant difference between males (M=130.82, SD=12.54) and females (M=132.44, SD=12.89) on intimacy; $t(106) = .75, p = .45$. There was no significant difference between males (M=120.86, SD=18.38) and females (M=118.27, SD=16.03) on emotional intelligence; $t(106) = -.62, p = .54$. The difference between males (M=114.80, SD=18.38) and females (M=112.63, SD=18.31) on passion did not reach statistical significance; $t(106) = .57, p = .57$. The difference between males (M=123.88, SD=13.94) and females (M=120.06, SD=18.99) on commitment was found to be statistically non-significant; $t(106) = 1.07, p = .29$. There was no significant difference between males (M=159.40, SD=14.67) and females (M=160.03, SD=18.07) on attitude towards intimacy; $t(106) = -.18, p = .86$.

Statistical analysis using Pearson Correlation was done. According to the results there was no significant correlation between intimacy, passion, commitment and emotional intelligence. However certain research results have shown that emotional intelligence is correlated with intimacy in a relationship. Cordova et al., (2005) stated that emotional skilfulness specifically the ability to identify and communicate emotions effects the process of intimacy. Also self-disclosure and empathic responding are important factors that predict feelings of intimacy (Mitchell et al., 2008).

In current study it was found that there was a positive correlation between managing own emotions subscale of emotional intelligence and commitment for an individual in intimate relationship. The finding is consistent with the past research finding according to which emotional intelligence was positively associated with fineness of relationship (Pokorski et al., 2012). Previous findings have emphasized the role of emotional intelligence in the relationship quality and satisfaction. Hence it can be inferred that level of commitment will also be high if partners are happy and content with each other. Smith et al., (2008) found that most satisfied couples rated their partners high on emotional intelligence and emphasized on discussing issues in their relationship.

There was a significant positive correlation found between attitude towards intimacy and emotional intelligence, also managing own emotions correlated positively with attitude towards intimacy. The findings match the results of previous study which report that emotional understanding leads to greater intimacy in couples by helping to interpret the attitudes and motivations of the partner (Keltner and Haidt, 2001). Similarly Dunham (2008) stated that

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emotional skills like identification of own emotions were correlated with intimate safety in individuals

The result shows that the difference is statistically non-significant and males and females do not differ much with respect to emotional intelligence. The result is consistent with previous finding by Dunham (2008) according to which there were no gender differences in difficulty identifying emotions and communicating emotions. However certain researchers conducted earlier showed that there exists gender differences in emotional intelligence. Van et al.; (2005) found that women score higher than men on emotional intelligence and Gender differences were reported in the ability to report emotions (Warren et al., 2005).

The t test result was found to be statistically non-significant. Previous studies reported contrasting results, for example it was found that there exists variation in experience of intimacy by male and female partners (Misty et al., 2003). Other factor is gender role

CONCLUSION

From the results it can be concluded that there exists a relationship between emotional intelligence and attitude towards intimacy of individuals in close relationships. People who are insightful, empathetic and have awareness of their emotional needs may have greater desire to become close to others and share intimate relationships. Also commitment in a relationship comes if people share good cohesive bond based on trust and partner responsiveness which is effected by emotional intelligence of the couple. The findings of this research can be useful in couple therapy and relationship counselling on how partners can work on their emotional intelligence aspect which would facilitate to create more warmth and closeness between them.

The study can be conducted with large sample size and equal gender ratio to find better results. The concept of intimacy varies with culture hence future research in this area can use a scale to measure intimacy which is more appropriate to the Indian setting and culture

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