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The effect of education of Sternberg's components of love on intimacy of couples.

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Abstract

Purpose: The present quasi-experimental study aimed to investigate the effect of education of Sternberg's components of love (passion, intimacy, commitment) on intimacy of couples. **Methodology**: Twenty teacher couples from Zarqan, Iran, who had been married for more than 4 years were recruited through convenience sampling and randomized to intervention and control groups (10 each). The Marital Intimacy Questionnaire (MIQ) was used for date collection, and analysis of covariance and independent t test were used for data analysis. **Findings**: Mean differences in scores for global intimacy, affection, intimacy, openness, and consensus between the two groups were significant. Also, the results show that the training of components of love significantly improved intimacy problems between the couples However, no significant effect of training program was observed for affection. **Discussion:** training of Sternberg's components of love positively affects the couples' intimacy. Self-expression skills have helped participants to better understand the sources of stress, needs, and desires, enabling them to effectively resolve their issues.

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1. Introduction

Marriage and starting a family is among the most complicated stages in the human life. Marriage is a comoplex, intricate, and dynamic human relationship with unique aspects, the result of which is the family as the most basic social institution. Devotion, a healthy and productive atmosphere, and warm and intimate interpersonal relationships in family could contribute to personal development and fulfillment. A healthy family is the foundation of healthy society (Goldenberg I, Goldenberg,2000).

Scholars in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, sociology, anthropology, and education, all agree that love is a learned emotional phenomenon. Our love for others, and others' for us, can motivate us to endure the worst situations in life. In his triangular theory of love, Sternberg considers love as comprising three components, namely, passion, intimacy, and commitment (Sternberg,1988).

2. literature Review

Passion refers to drives that leads to romance, physical attraction, and sexual consummation. It also refers to such needs as self-esteem, closeness, and self-actualization. Passion includes emotions like hope, shame, vulnerability, desire, and admiration. Passion, then, comprises emotional and motivational aspectgs of love. Intimacy refers to behaviors that increase emotional closeness, which includes supportiveness, empathy, communication, and sharing. It thus entails within its scope those feelings that give rise to the experience of warmth in a loving relationship. Commitment refers, in the short term, to a decision to love a certain one and, in the long term, to a decision to maintain that love toward a predictable future. Commitment serves a cognitive rather than emotional function and includes deliberate and willfull intention (Sternberg 1988). In general, passion, intimacy, and commitment can be considered the emotional, behavioral, and cognitive aspects of love respectively. The three components of love interact with each other. Passion leads to participation in an intimate relationship. Intimacy, combined with passion, builds trust and reduces the feeling of lonliness. Finally, commitment, which refers to the element of attachment, becomes particularly important. Thos is where the "partner" comes into being. Therefore, love cannot be experienced unless passion develops, then combines with intimacy, and, finally, a feeling of attachment with commitment is attained (Sternberg,1988).

The ideal love would look like an equilateral triangle, implying that a loving relation with a balanced amount of these components would be the best one. Furthermore, happy couples are those who have similar love triangles: if partners harbor similar feelings towards each other, the relationship will be more harmonious (Waring_and etal,1983). Love is an essential factor for establishing a sustainable relation between two people who enjoy each other's company. For most people love may not be the sufficient reason for marriage, but intimacy is an essential component in a loving relation (Langer and etal,2010). In order to develop intimacy, i.e. the component responsible for warm and emotional relationship, it is essential that an atmosphere of security be created through sharing. For the constant development of intimate behavior patterns, it is often expected that the intimate sharing should be mutual. Clinical research and practice shows that in today's society couples experience serious difficulties in establishing and maintaining intimate relations as well as fulfilling each other's expectations. Developing and maintaining intimate relationship and satisfying emotional and mental needs within a marriage are skills that require not only mental health and

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healthy preliminary experiences, but also having rational attitudes and development of certain skills (Bagarozzi , 2001).

The health and happiness of family depends on the existence of intimate, healthy, and productive relations between spauses, and unless the family has a sound and solid foundation, the outcome will be a negative atmosphere, a gloomy environment, and individuals who will be prone to multitude of physical and mental problems. Research shows that lack of intimate relations could predispose the individuals to mental disorders such as depression, which is among the major reasons for referral to psychiatry centers (Waring,1981). Results of a study showed that Machiavellianism was negatively associated with the relationship components of intimacy, passion, and commitment, although it also reported a positive association between aprimary psychopathy and the relationship components, and a negative association between secondary psychopathy and life satisfaction and intimacy (Ali and etal, 2010). Overbeek and colleagus, studying a sample of 435 teenagers aged 12–18, showed that passion, intimacy, and commitment in romantic relationships were positively associated with relationship satisfaction and duration (Overbeek and etal, 2007).

Today, various models and approaches have been developed for improving and enriching marital relationships with emphasis on enhancing communication skills in order to prevent marital problems rather than confronting the problems after they are unmasked. These approaches are psychological-educational in nature and include relationship enhancement, marital enrichment programs, Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills, and couple relationship enhancement therapy/prevention, and their focus is on couples who have not yet experienced major communication problems (Oraki and etal, 2012). An effective approach in this regard is the Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills (PAIRS) program, developed by Gordon, which provides a comprehensive system to enhance self-knowledge and to develop the ability to sustain pleasurable intimate relationships (Peluso and etal, 2011). DeMaria and Hannah maintain that PAIRS is a Multifacet model that integrates concepts, values, and skills related to love, intimacy, ans marriage (DeMaria and etal, 2003).

Marital problems are not just limited to divorce. Clinincal research and practice shows that most of the marital problems arise from lack of intimacy. Intimate relationship is an essential human need that failure to satisfy it will lead to increased conflicts, decreased marital satisfaction, and development of mental and emotional problems. Men and women differ in terms of experience of intimacy, satisfaction with experiences of sexual intimacy, and recreational aspects of their relationship (Greeff and etal, 2001). Imhonde and colleagues reported that love and affection are psychological factors that increase intimacy, providing a feeling of security (Imhonde and etal, 2008). Increase in marital dissatisfaction and divorce on the one hand, and the couples desire to enrich and improve marital relationship on the other hand, indicates to the necessity of expert interventions and education in this regard. Therefore, it seems necessary to use the latest scientific evidence to resolve marital problems and prevent divorce. Better recognition of the important aspects of mrital relationship, including intimacy, could lead to development of marriage enrichment and couple therapy programs, improving the function of the family and the social functioning of its members (Toth and etal,1995). Considering the fact that Iran has seen a deterioration in the couples's relationship and an increase in divorce rate in recent years, the necessity of providing education about different components of love and studying its effect on couples' intimacy as an important factor in sustainable and blissful relation seems obvious. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to investigate the effect of education about components of love (intimacy, passion, and commitment) on aspects of couples' intimacy.

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3. Methodology

This was a quasi-experimental study with pretest-posttest design with control group. The statistical population included all teacher couples in Zarqan who had been married for at least four years. Twenty couples were recruited through convenience sampling and randomized to intervention and control groups (10 each). The intervention group received an education including 9 sessions, 2 hours each. The measurement instrument was the Marital Intimacy Questionnaire (MIQ) (Van den Broucke and etal 1995).The questionnaire has 56 items and measures 5 components of marital intimacy, namely, intimacy problems (14 items), consensus (12 items), openness (12 items), affection (8 items), and commitment (10 items). The questionnaire has been validated using data from 93 couples in the United States, with α coefficients being 0.86 (intimacy problems), 0.86 (consensus), 0.83 (openness), 0.82 (affection), and 0.7 (commitment). Its construct validity was evaluated through examination of its relationship with other instruments measuring relevant aspects of marital functioning. These instruments included a global rating on a 10-point scale of the degree of marital intimacy currently experienced in the relationship, using the participants' own definition of intimacy; a nine-item scale measuring communication intimacy; and the Dutch version of the Maudsley Marital Questionnaire comprising three subscales of marital, sexual, and general life dissatisfaction. The correlational analysis showed that subscales of openness, affection, and intimacy problems were highly correlated with communication intimacy (0.47, 0.46, and -0.45, respectively). In sum, MIQ enjoyed desirable validity to measure different dimensions of marital intimacy. Items were scored on a scale of 0–4 (rarely = 0, always = 4, except for 17 items that were inversely scored).

4. Findings

Mean (SD) scores for the variables of study are presented in Table 1. The scores for all the variables have increased after intervention, except for affection, which shows a slight decrease.

Table 1. Mean (SD) scores for variables in Pre-test and Post-test stage

Intimacy components		Pre-test	Post-test
Intimacy problems	expremental	36.85 (7.15)	43.75 (4.96)
	Control	31.65 (10.23)	30.85 (9.23)
Consensus	expremental	25.6 (3.24)	28.6 (2.87)
	Control	25.6 (3.02)	25.65 (3.35)
Openness	expremental	26.8 (5.53)	32.4 (4.3)
	Control	28.25 (5.47)	28.8 (5.55)
Affection	expremental	17.1 (1.99)	16.9 (0.91)
	Control	16.9 (1.99)	17.15 (1.98)
Commitment	expremental	25.15 (4.28)	28.95 (2.61)
	Control	22.1 (6.42)	22.65 (5.7)
Global intimacy	expremental	131.5 (18.32)	150.6 (12.37)
	Control	124.5 (21.27)	125.1 (19.54)

Table 2 presents the results of Leven test for equality of variances, which shows that the assumption of equal variances is met for global intimacy and three components of consensus, openness, and intimacy. Thus use of analysis of covariance is warranted.

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Table 2. Results of Leven test for equality of variances

component	F	Df 1	Df 2	Sig.
Intimacy problems	4.02	1	38	.05
Consensus	2.38	1	38	.101
Openness	2.56	1	38	.118
Global intimacy	4.09	1	38	.05

According to Table 3, the observed differences in beween the intervention and the control group are significant. The effect size for the component of intimacy is 0.39, meaning that 39% of the difference in the variance of post-intervention scores is explained by the education of the components of love. The calculated power of the test is 0.99. For the component of consensus, the effect size is 0.23, with a power of 0.9. The effect size for other variables, namely openness and global intimacy are 0.14 and 0.39, respectively.

Table 3. Results of analysis of covariance for comparison of means

Component	RMS	Df	F	Sig.	Eta squared	power
Intimacy problems	1158.41	1	24	.0001	.39	.99
Consensus	87.03	1	10.98	.002	.23	.90
Openness	149.07	1	6.21	.02	.14	.68
Global intimacy	5061.93	1	22.30	.0001	.39	.99

RMS: root-mean-square

Table 4. Result of t test for post-intervention scores of affections and commitmentarison

Component	t	Df	Mean difference	SE	p
Affection	-0.51	38	0.25	0.49	.61
Commitment	4.5	38	6.3	1.4	.0001

As seen in Table 4, the education protocol did not make significan difference between the two groups in term of affection ($t = -0.51$, $p = 0.61$), although the difference in commitment is significant ($t = 4.5$, $p = 0.0001$).

5. Discussion

Our study aimed to investigate the effect of education about components of love on couples' intimacy. The observed difference in the score for global intimacy between the groups was significant, Also, the results show that the training of components of love significantly improved intimacy problems between the couples, which is supported by the findings of (Heller and etal 1998). who reported increased marital satisfaction in couples following Imago Therapy. Similarly, Bagarozzi reported increased intimacy in couples participating in Imago Therapy sessions.9 Bagarozzi 2001).

When couples are willing to participate in intervention programs, they feel that the other partner cares about them. Therefore, they enjoy the conversation and new information are exchanged between them. This kind of communication makes them share their needs and thoughts more freely, make jokes, feel each other, and enjoy the companionship. According to Table 3, the education of components of love significantly increased the component of intimacy ($p < .001$). Participation in love components training increases mutual

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respect and value. In intimate relationship, couples exhibit a caring attitude to each other. The boundaries of the relationship is clear, respect and trust in each other is protected, and the partners show commitment to each other, even in the absence of the other. In fact, what has caused the increased intimacy between the couples in the study is the skills they have acquired through the intervention. Central to this increased intimacy are empathy, proper feedback, sharing, acceptance, and understanding, all of which are considered in the education of Sternberg's components of love.

Our study also showed that consensus component of marital intimacy was significantly different between the two groups following intervention ($p = 0.002$). Theoreticaly, since communication, argument, and conflict resolution skills were part of this educational intervention, it is likely that the skills and their transfer to real-life situation has helped the couples to achieve consensus. Self-expression skills have helped participants to better understand the sources of stress, needs, and desires, enabling them to effectively resolve their issues.

We also found a significant difference in openness component between the intervention and control group following intervention ($p = 0.02$). Honest responses and support in close relationships as well as the need to safe emptional sharing contribute to a great extent to improved relationship. Couples can develop positive interactions and foster a positive perception and attitude towards each other.

As seen in Table 4, our training of love components did not bring about a significant difference in affection between the two groups ($t = -0.51$, $p = 0.61$). It would be expected that couples in the intervention group to be more caring any attentive to their spouses, provide a safe and supportive environment for them, respond to their needs and desires, and eventually feel more affection towards them. It is likely that cultural factors might be involved.It seems they were educated and don't need more information for better life.

Finally, we found a significant effect of the educational intervention on commitment component ($t = 4.5$, $p < 0.01$). It seems that educational material familiarized the couples with effective communication and equiped them with strong communication skills and helped them to develop an effective communication using verbal and nonverbal clues. This could contribute to increased commitment.

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