

**INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP EXPERIENCE EFFECTS ON  
INDIVIDUAL AN PSYCHOLOGICAL TENDENCIES  
WITHIN AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP: PRELIMINARY  
INVESTIGATION**

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**Abstract:** Intimate relationships can play a significant role for humanity because if individuals would not interact, socialize and reproduce, the human species would not procreate (Miller & Perlman, 2008). Therefore, individuals in general have a desire to love and to belong, some declaring that the sensation of being loved and wanted is very essential in their life (Miller & Perlman, 2008). The purpose of this study was to investigate how intimate relationship experience (i.e. number of partners so far) can affect some psychological and individual tendencies (such as: relationship esteem, motivation and satisfaction) within an intimate relationship. It is a study that takes part of a larger investigation regarding intimate relationships and our aim was to deepen our knowledge and to better understand relationship dynamics and individual and psychological tendencies within the Romanian population. In this light, with the use of the Multidimensional Relationship Questionnaire (MRQ; Snell et al., 2002), 53

university students participated in this study. We investigated if there was any correlation (positive or negative) between intimate relationship experience and some individual and psychological tendencies (such as: relationship esteem, motivation and satisfaction) regarding intimate relationships. After the use of Spearman correlation and ANOVA test, results showed that intimate relationship experience (number of partners so far) had a positive relation with the studied individual and psychological tendencies (such as relationship esteem, motivation and satisfaction). With the present results, we can assume that individuals who have a high level of experience regarding intimate relationships can experience high levels of esteem, motivation and satisfaction within an intimate relationship. Further investigations and conclusions are discussed.

**Key Words:** intimate relationship, individual tendencies, psychological tendencies, experience, positive relationship.

## **Introduction**

Aristotle once said that “one person is a friend to another if he is friendly to the other and the other is friendly to him in return” (Aristotle & Ross, 2005, pp. 536). He also believed that “a human being is by nature a political animal” (Aristotle & Ross, 2005, p. 452), therefore it can be assumed that by nature humans are social beings (Irwin & Fine, 1995). According to these statements, Aristotle has been contemplating on interpersonal relationships over 2.300 years ago (Irwin & Fine, 1995). In this light, the philosopher suggested that relationships can be based on three different concepts, such as: virtue (relationships based on virtue tend to last longer because individuals who get involved in these type of relationships tend to value love and they have the capacity to give love to others over receiving love from others), pleasure (these types of relationships are based on passion and pleasure and are characterized by attractive qualities such as intelligence and pleasant physical looks) and utility (relationships based on utility are described as being similar to an exchange, where both individuals involved in this type of relationship expect something in return) (Irwin & Fine, 1995).

In order to have a better understanding on intimate relationships, an explanation on the meaning of the term *intimacy* must be given. The word *intimacy* has several meanings. Derived from the Latin vocabulary, *intimus*

which means *inner* or *inmost*, this term also refers to the interior experiences and emotions of an individual, something that can be private or confidential (Bennet, 2000) or the feeling of being in a close and personal relation and belonging with another individual (Smyer, 2013). In literature intimacy is also described as being “closeness and interdependence of partners, the extent of self-disclosure, and the warmth or affection experienced within the relationship” (Perlman & Fehr, 1987, pg. 16).

Individuals in general have an inclination to love and to belong, some declaring that the perception of being loved and wanted is very meaningful in their life (Miller & Perlman, 2008). In literature it is postulated that intimate relationships can play a significant role because in order for mankind and society to survive, individuals need to interact, socialize and reproduce (Miller & Perlman, 2008).

Intimacy in relationships usually involves both partners in knowing each other and becoming comfortable with each other (Smyer, 2013). The socialization process can play an important role for intimacy, because if two individuals engage in an intimate conversation, they can share hidden thoughts and feelings, process that can bring them closer together and can build comfort and trust (Smyer, 2013). Intimate communication is the process that can create confidence between individuals while connecting them (Moore, 1985; Smyer, 2013).

Intimate behavior can be found among individuals engaged in a romantic relationship as well as between family members and close friends (Smyer, 2013). This behavior can be based on self-knowledge (knowledge of one's own sensations, thoughts, beliefs, and other mental states), self-differentiation (the ability to distinguish between thoughts and feelings in an emotional relationship system), self-disclosure (a process of communication by which one individual reveals information about himself or herself to another individual, such as: thoughts, feelings, aspirations, goals, failures, successes, fears, and dreams, as well as personal likes and dislikes) and confidence (the sensation or belief that one can have faith in or count on someone) (Smyer, 2013).

In this light, intimate behaviors can manifest themselves throughout different types of intimacy, each requiring different forms of approaches. Thus four types of intimacy are identified, such as (Kakabase & Kakabase, 2004; Smyer, 2013):

1. *Physical intimacy* - represented by people's experiences of physical contact which usually involves the sense of touch. This type of intimacy can involve touching, kissing, hugging and holding hands with the partner (Smyer, 2013).

2. *Emotional intimacy* - represented by the feeling of falling in love and can be naturally developed over time, usually when a certain level of trust and personal bonds have been achieved. In the process of falling in love there are a number of biochemical processes stimulated by sexual attraction (Lowndes, 1996), but the socialization process also plays an important role because it can lead to physical closeness, which can encourage and assure the intimate contact (Giddens, 1990).
3. *Cognitive intimacy* - represented by communication and socialization. Duck (1994) affirmed that communication and sharing ideas, either symbolically or directly, can play an important role in relationship dynamics (Prager, 1995). Also, Hatfield (1988) affirmed that cognitive intimacy takes place when two individuals reveal themselves and “share profound information about one another...” (Hatfield, 1988, pg. 205; Prager, 1995).
4. *Experiential intimacy* – can be represented by experiences, such as when two individuals meet to interact with each other in some form of activity while maintaining minimal communication (they don’t share thoughts or feelings with each other) (Healthy Place, <https://www.healthyplace.com/relationships/intimaterelationships/> for example even though two individuals don’t share thoughts and feelings with each other, they can be involved in some kind of an activity with each other, such as painting a house; they could be astonished to think that they were involved in some form of intimate activity with each other, however from an experiential perspective, they could be very intimately involved.

In literature, two other forms of intimacy are discussed. Mills & Clark (1982) found that intimate relationships can be based on emotional intimacy or strategic intimacy, which in turn can influence the development of a relationship in one way or another. Strategic intimacy is based on some form of exchange and can be easily broken down when there is any kind of disagreement, while relationships based on emotional intimacy are much more robust, involve feelings and can last longer (Mills & Clark, 1982). For example if an individual forms a relationship with someone just to receive something in return, without involving emotional intimacy and communication, it can be easily broken down because there is no sentimental interest to maintain such relationships (Mills & Clark, 1982).

Studies from literature focus their attention on individual and environmental factors that can have an influence on people’s intimate relationships (Dush & Amato, 2005; Furman & Schaffer, 2003; Lowe et al. 2012), examining a wide variety of factors that include family relations,

friendships and romantic relationships (Gottman, 1994; Gottman & Lewson, 2000, Orbuch et al., 2002).

A study, which involved 52 couples during an oral interview and an interaction task, determined what traits and qualities were responsible for divorce or marital stability (Buehlman et al., 1992). It was found that couples who divorced were less fond for their partners, presented high levels of negativity, shared limited activities with their partners, were disorganized, gave up quickly, and were disappointed about marriage (Buehlman et al., 1992). Therefore, it can be assumed that individuals who are fond for their partners, are more positive, share activities with their partner, are organized and are happy about their marriage can have a longer and healthier relationship. As arguments from literature state, emotional intimacy can be developed when a certain level of trust and personal bonds have been achieved (Kakabase & Kakabase, 2004; Smyer, 2013).

Lowe et al. (2012) focused their attention on studying the changes in people's relationships with their partners after the Hurricane Katrina incident. Some participants declared that their intimate relationships were affected after the disaster in a negative way and some affirmed that their relationship was affected in a positive way (Lowe et al., 2012). The emergence of Hurricane Katrina has led to a number of stress factors (such as long-term separation and losses in general) that had a negative influence on the relationships of some couples, while the relationships of other couples have become closer and stronger with better communication, more support and change of perspective (Lowe et al., 2012). In this light, it can be assumed that environmental factors can alter the evolution of a relationship in both directions; either the affected partners work together to overcome the stress factors, either they go their separate ways.

Regarding relationship experience a study shows that adolescents' relationship experiences can play a central role in their future relationships as adults, because early relationships can represent the required background that can prepare young individuals for their future relationships; experiences regarding intimate relationships may represent a factor that can influence self-confidence and can encourage the interaction with the opposite sex (ASPE, 2008). Other findings have shown that interpersonal experiences in family and peer contexts in early childhood through adolescence may form the basis on which later competence in intimate relationships develops (Rauer et al., 2013).

To assess individual tendencies regarding intimate relationships there are a number of tools in the scientific literature, such as: Relationship Belief Inventory (Eidelson et al., 1982), Experiences in Close Relationships scales (Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1998), and Relationship Styles Questionnaire (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). One of the tools successfully used in assessing

individual tendencies regarding intimate relationships is the Multidimensional Relationship Questionnaire (MRQ), which was validated and developed by Snell et al. (2002).

## **Objectives and hypotheses**

### *1. Purpose and objective*

The present study is a preliminary investigation that takes part of a larger research regarding intimate relationships and our aim is to deepen our knowledge and to better understand relationship dynamics and individual and psychological tendencies within the Romanian population. The purpose of this study is to investigate how intimate relationship experience (i.e. number of partners so far) can affect some psychological and individual tendencies (such as: relationship esteem, motivation and satisfaction) within an intimate relationship.

### *2. Hypotheses*

*Hypotheses 1:* There will be a positive association between relationship experience (i.e. number of partners so far) and some psychological and individual tendencies (such as: relationship esteem, motivation and satisfaction).

*Hypotheses 2:* There will be significant differences at the level of relationship esteem, motivation and satisfaction between the groups with different levels of relationship experiences (i.e. no relationships so far; 1 relationships so far; between 2-5 relationships so far; between 5-10 relationships so far; and above 10 relationships so far).

## **Methods**

### *1. Participants*

A total of 53 individuals participated voluntarily in this study. All participants come from urban (66%) and rural (34%) environments and were under-graduate and graduate students from Arad, Romania, having the latest studies completed in high school (47.2%), post high school (7.5%), bachelor's degree (26.4%) or master's degree (18.9%). The participants of this study were comprised of 43 females and 10 males (N = 53), aged between 18 and 53 years (M = 26.77; SD = 9.74). The gender distribution of the sample reflects the female majority of students in the Psychology specialization of „Aurel Vlaicu” University of Arad, Romania.

### *2. Instruments*

*The Multidimensional Relationship Questionnaire (MRQ; Snell et al., 2002)*

The Multidimensional Relationship Questionnaire (MRQ; Snell et al., 2002) was designed to measure individual tendencies regarding intimate

relationship perceptions. MRQ (Snell et al., 2002) and its scales were successfully used in a number of studies (Büyükşahin, 2004; Altın & Şerife, 2010; Good & Sanchez, 2009) and regarding the internal consistency of this instrument, the study conducted by Snell et al. (2002) showed that it is a reliable and valid instrument, with the values of the alpha Cronbach coefficient ranging from .70 to .93.

The Multidimensional Relationship Questionnaire (MRQ; Snell et al., 2002) consists of 60 items, with responses ranging from A (Not at all characteristic of me) to E (Very characteristic of me). The instrument consists of 12 sub-scales, each scale being represented by 5 items. The sub-scales of this tool are (Snell et al., 2002):

1. *Relationship Esteem* - is defined as a generalized characteristic that evaluates in a positive way one's capacity to relate intimately with another individual;
2. *Relationship Preoccupation* - is represented by the tendency to become involved in an exaggerated, obsessed and absorbed way in an intimate relationship, while excluding thoughts and preoccupations from other aspects of life;
3. *Internal Relationship Control* - subscale designed to measure individual's expectations of perceived personal influence on intimate relationships;
4. *Relationship Consciousness* - designed to measure individual's insight on intimate relationships;
5. *Relationship Motivation* - represents the level of motivation regarding the involvement in an intimate relationship;
6. *Relationship Anxiety* - was designed to measure individual's anxiety regarding intimate relationships;
7. *Relationship Assertiveness* - is a subscale which measure individuals' tendency of being assertive about the intimate aspects of life;
8. *Relationship Depression* - is a scale which measures the individuals' predisposition to feel unhappy, disappointed and depressed when it comes to intimate relationships;
9. *External Relationship Control* - refers to people's beliefs and perceptions that external factors (forces that individuals cannot anticipate or control) can influence the way their intimate relationships works;
10. *Relationship Monitoring* - is represented by an individual's concern about the image of his or her own intimate relationship or the impression that others have about his or her personal relationship;



11. *Fear of Relationship* - is a scale designed to measure the levels of fear individuals experience when it comes to engage in an intimate relationship;
12. *Relationship Satisfaction* - is represented by the level of satisfaction an individual is experiencing within an intimate relationship, if the intimate needs are met and if he/she is satisfied or not with the intimate relationships he/she is engaged in;

In order to verify or hypotheses, the present study we will use the *Relationship Esteem* scale, the *Relationship Motivation* scale and the *Relationship Satisfaction* scale.

### 3. *Design and procedure*

The present study is a correlational and explorative one, where the association and differences regarding relationship experience (i.e. number of partners so far) and individual/psychological tendencies (such as: relationship esteem, motivation and satisfaction) were analyzed. The studied variables were relationship experience (i.e. number of partners so far) and individual/psychological tendencies (such as: relationship esteem, motivation and satisfaction).

For the first hypotheses we used a correlational design, having as dependent variables relationship experience (i.e. number of partners so far) and the studied individual/psychological tendencies (such as: relationship esteem, motivation and satisfaction); and for the second hypotheses we used a non-experimental design, having as independent variable relationship experience (i.e. number of partners so far) and as dependent variables individual/psychological tendencies (such as: relationship esteem, motivation and satisfaction).

The Multidimensional Relationship Questionnaire (MRQ; Snell et al., 2002) was uploaded on the Google Forms platform and the participants were asked to respond as sincerely as possible to the statements of the instrument. The participants were given an informed consent consisting in an agreement of participation to the research and an assurance on the confidentiality of the collected data.

## **Results**

***Hypotheses 1:*** There will be a positive association between relationship experience (i.e. number of partners so far) and some psychological and individual tendencies (such as: relationship esteem, motivation and satisfaction).

In order to verify our hypotheses we used Spearman correlation to calculate the association between relationship experience and relationship esteem, motivation and satisfaction. It was found that relationship experience



had a positive association with the studied individual and psychological tendencies, such as  $r = .500^{**}$  (relationship esteem),  $r = .416^{**}$  (relationship motivation),  $p < 0.01$  and  $r = .287^*$  (relationship satisfaction),  $p < 0.05$  (Table 1.).

**Table 1.**  
**Spearman correlation between relationship experience and relationship esteem, motivation and satisfaction**

	Relationship experience	
	Correlation Coefficient	p (2-tailed)
Relationship esteem	.500 <sup>**</sup>	.000
Relationship motivation	.416 <sup>**</sup>	.002
Relationship satisfaction	.287 <sup>*</sup>	.037

<sup>\*\*</sup>  $p < 0.01$

<sup>\*</sup>  $p < 0.05$

**Hypotheses 2:** There will be significant differences at the level of relationship esteem, motivation and satisfaction between the groups with different levels of relationship experiences (i.e. no relationships so far; 1 relationships so far; between 2-5 relationships so far; between 5-10 relationships so far; and above 10 relationships so far).

In order to verify our hypotheses we calculated the means separately for each group regarding relationship esteem (no relationships so far,  $M = 2.16$ ; 1 relationships so far,  $M = 3.23$ ; between 2-5 relationships so far,  $M = 3.27$ ; between 5-10 relationships so far,  $M = 3.77$ ; and above 10 relationships so far,  $M = 4.00$ ), relationship motivation (no relationships so far,  $M = 1.64$ ; 1 relationships so far,  $M = 2.63$ ; between 2-5 relationships so far,  $M = 2.77$ ; between 5-10 relationships so far,  $M = 3.17$ ; and above 10 relationships so far,  $M = 3.35$ ) and relationship satisfaction (no relationships so far,  $M = 2.12$ ; 1 relationships so far,  $M = 3.67$ ; between 2-5 relationships so far,  $M = 3.50$ ; between 5-10 relationships so far,  $M = 3.50$ ; and above 10 relationships so far,  $M = 4.05$ ) (Table 2).

**Table 2.**  
**Descriptive statistics regarding relationship esteem, motivation and satisfaction between the groups with different levels of relationship experiences**

Relationship experiences		Relationship esteem	Relationship motivation	Relationship satisfaction
no relationship s so far	M	2.16	1.64	2.12
	N	5	5	5
	SD	0.93	0.52	1.38
1 relationship s so far	M	3.23	2.63	3.67
	N	12	12	12
	SD	0.90	1.30	0.95
between 2-5 relationship s so far	M	3.27	2.77	3.50
	N	18	18	18
	SD	0.63	0.92	0.79
between 5- 10 relationship s so far	M	3.77	3.17	3.50
	N	6	6	6
	SD	0.43	0.69	1.38
above 10 relationship s so far	M	4.00	3.35	4.05
	N	12	12	12
	SD	0.67	0.97	0.62

M = Mean; N = Number of subjects; SD = Standard Deviation

As it can be observed in Table 2, the comparison of the means regarding relationship esteem, motivation and satisfaction between the groups with different levels of relationship experience, shows that as relationship experience becomes larger so does the means for the studied psychological tendencies. In order to verify if the registered differences are statistically significant we applied ANOVA test. Results indicate that there are statistically significant differences regarding relationship esteem ( $F = 6.49, p = .00$ ), motivation ( $F = 2.98, p = .03$ ) and satisfaction ( $F = 3.85, p = .01$ ) between the groups with different levels of relationship experience (table 3).

**Table 3.**  
**ANOVA test for relationship esteem, motivation and satisfaction between the groups with different levels of relationship experience**

	F	p
Relationship esteem	6.49	.00
Relationship motivation	2.98	.03
Relationship satisfaction	3.85	.01

### **Discussions and conclusions**

Results of this study suggest that individuals who have a high level of experience regarding intimate relationships can experience high levels of esteem, motivation and satisfaction within an intimate relationship.

Results obtained by the Spearman correlation confirm the first hypotheses, which stated that there will be a positive association between relationship experience (i.e. number of partners so far) and the studied psychological and individual tendencies (such as: relationship esteem, motivation and satisfaction).

Results obtained by ANOVA test confirm the second hypotheses which stated that there will be significant differences at the level of relationship esteem, motivation and satisfaction between the groups with different levels of relationship experiences (i.e. no relationships so far; 1 relationships so far; between 2-5 relationships so far; between 5-10 relationships so far; and above 10 relationships so far).

In this light, like in every aspect of life, as the experience grows, the skill and knowledge for the specific domain become larger. As regard to intimate relationships, it can be assumed that individuals who have experience in intimate relationships can have the skill and knowledge to engage successfully in a relationship, because with a high level of experience they can chose the right partner for themselves and can be involved in the relationship with higher esteem, motivation and satisfaction.

The results of this study are promising and relevant in opening the possibility to study further individual tendencies regarding intimate relationships. Besides relationship experience, different variables such as family

background, gender, personality or education can be studied in order to better understand relationship dynamics in the Romanian population.

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