



Brief report

What it feels like to be me: Linking emotional intelligence, identity, and intimacy[☆]Hemali Maher^{*}, Christine N. Winston, S. Usha Rani

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ABSTRACT

The search for the self and for an intimate other are the normative tasks of adolescence and early adulthood. The role of emotions in the resolution of these developmental tasks, however, remains largely under-studied, especially in non-western cultures. The objective of the present study, therefore, was to examine the relationships between emotional intelligence, identity, and intimacy, among Indian adolescents. Differences across genders (boys vs. girls) and types of school (gender segregated vs. integrated) were also explored. A sample of 486 adolescents completed measures of emotional intelligence, identity, and intimacy. Girls scored higher than boys on intimacy, and those from segregated schools scored higher, than those from integrated schools, on emotional intelligence. Significant relationships emerged between emotional intelligence, and identity and intimacy, and were invariant across the groups. These findings underscore the pivotal role that emotional intelligence plays in healthy adolescent development, irrespective of personal and environmental variables.

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Finding one's self and finding one's "other half" are the normative tasks of adolescence and early adulthood (Erikson, 1950). Because successful resolution of these tasks is essential to psychological health (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Buhrmester, 1990; Waterman, 1992), researchers have sought to identify the different factors that facilitate these turbulent developmental transitions (e.g., parent and peer support; Para, 2008). The role of emotions in identity and intimacy development, however, has largely been ignored, even though there is evidence to suggest that emotional intelligence may, in fact, be the *link* between these crucial stages of psychosocial development (Seaton & Beaumont, 2011).

Emotional intelligence provides adolescents with competencies that are necessary to navigate through the storm and stress of change and transition. Conversely, a (perceived) inability to manage such feelings of confusion and doubt has been found to be associated with a diffuse-avoidant identity style, which, in turn, has been found to be negatively associated with intimacy (Seaton & Beaumont, 2011). What may matter more than emotional intelligence, therefore, is self-perceptions of emotional intelligence, referred to as "Trait Emotional Intelligence" or "Emotional Self-efficacy" (Petrides, Sangareau, Furnham, & Frederickson, 2006).

Although there is evidence to support a link between the aforementioned variables, replicability of these findings in non-western cultures is questionable. Unlike individualistic cultures which emphasize individuation of the self, in collectivistic

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cultures, much of one's identity is pre-ordained and exploration is consequently, minimal (Sukumaran, 2010), thereby rendering emotional self-efficacy less necessary for identity consolidation. The primary objective of the present study, therefore, was to test the replicability of the link between emotional intelligence, identity, and intimacy, using a sample of Indian adolescents. If these relationships can be replicated, then, Seaton and Beaumont's (2011) hypothesis can also be tested: Emotional intelligence will mediate the relationship between identity and intimacy.

A second objective was to study the effect that a personal (demographic) variable (i.e., gender: boys vs. girls) and environmental variable (i.e., type of school: gender-segregated vs. gender-integrated) might have on (the relationships between) emotional intelligence, identity, and intimacy. For instance, Erikson's contention that identity precedes intimacy has been challenged on the grounds that it is androcentric in its value orientation (Gilligan, 1982), although recent research findings indicate otherwise (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010). Similarly, studies have found that occupational choice, an important identity domain (Marcia, 1966), is less stereotypical among girls from segregated schools, when compared to those from integrated schools, because of the relative absence of gender-related norms in such settings (Sullivan, Joshi, & Leonard, 2010). Exploring these group differences will not only test the cross-cultural validity of past findings, but will also extend literature by specifying the conditions under which emotional intelligence is linked to identity and intimacy.

1. Method

1.1. Participants

Six hundred and three students, from 21 different classes, across six higher secondary English-medium schools in the city of Chennai, participated in the study. Those who indicated that they had switched the type of school that they attended after 8th standard (i.e., high school) were excluded from the study ($n = 117$), in order to homogenize the groups. The size of the final sample was therefore 486, consisting of 135 boys and 162 girls from three integrated schools, and 95 boys and 94 girls from three segregated schools. The mean age of the sample was 15.90 ($SD = 0.57$).

1.2. Measures

1.2.1. Trait emotional intelligence questionnaire – adolescent short form (TEIQ-ASF)

Developed by Petrides et al. (2006), the TEIQ-ASF is a 30-item measure of trait emotional intelligence. Responses to each item, rated on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree), are summed to arrive at a total score; half the items (i.e., 15) are reverse-scored. The higher the score, the more emotionally intelligent the respondent perceives oneself to be. The scale has demonstrated high internal consistency (0.80), and concurrent and predictive validity (Mikolajczak, Luminet, Leroy, & Roy, 2007). In the present study, the internal consistency of the scale was found to be 0.73.

1.2.2. Adolescent ego identity scale (AEIS)

The AEIS (Tzuriel, 1984) is a 38-item measure of identity development. Items are rated on a scale of 1 (Disagree Strongly) to 5 (Agree Strongly) and averaged to yield the scale score; half the items (i.e., 19) are reverse-scored. Higher scores are indicative of a better-developed ego identity. The internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.77$; Tzuriel & Klein, 1977) and construct validity of the scale have been established. Cronbach's alpha, calculated for the data gathered in the present study, was found to be 0.80.

1.2.3. Intimate friendship scale (IFS)

The IFS (Sharabany, 1994) is a 32-item scale that measures experienced-intimacy in one's relationship with a best friend. Each item is rated on a 7-point scale ranging from "Does not describe this relationship at all" (1) to "Describes this relationship very well" (7). The scale is scored by averaging the individual item scores. Higher scores indicate greater intimacy in one's friendship. The scale is internally-consistent ($\alpha = 0.91$; Mayseless, Wiseman, & Hai, 1998) and has demonstrated criterion-group validity, predictive validity, and content validity. The scale was found to have strong internal consistency in the present study (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.92$).

2. Results

A 2×2 (Gender [girls, boys] \times Type of School [segregated, integrated]) factorial ANOVA was conducted to examine group differences in the study variables. The interaction effect was not statistically significant for emotional intelligence, $F(1, 482) = 1.23$, $p = 0.27$, identity, $F(1, 482) = 1.71$, $p = 0.19$, or intimacy, $F(1, 482) = 1.93$, $p = 0.17$. Girls ($M = 5.80$, $SD = 0.95$) scored higher than boys ($M = 5.36$, $SD = 0.92$), on intimacy, $F(1, 482) = 22.69$, $p = 0.00$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.05$. However, gender differences with regard to emotional intelligence, $F(1, 482) = 0.23$, $p = 0.63$, and identity, $F(1, 482) = 0.02$, $p = 0.89$, were not significant. With regard to the type of school, those from segregated schools ($M = 137.18$, $SD = 20.83$) scored higher than their counterparts from integrated schools ($M = 131.26$, $SD = 20.91$), on emotional intelligence $F(1, 482) = 9.69$, $p = 0.00$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$. The two groups, however, did not differ on either identity, $F(1, 482) = 2.07$, $p = 0.15$, or intimacy, $F(1, 482) = 0.35$, $p = 0.56$.

Correlation analysis yielded significant coefficients between identity and intimacy, $r = 0.24$, $p = 0.00$. Significant coefficients also emerged between emotional intelligence and both identity, $r = 0.71$, $p = 0.00$, and intimacy, $r = 0.21$, $p = 0.00$. The correlation coefficients between the study variables did not differ significantly across the four groups, as is evident from

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