



SOCIAL MATURITY AND INTIMACY DURING EMERGING ADULTHOOD

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Abstract

The present study investigates the relationship between social maturity and dimensions of intimacy in the context of interpersonal relationships among students. The research was conducted on a sample of 245 students (126 women and 119 men) aged between 19 and 24 years. The Social Maturity Scale (SMS) and the Multidimensional Inventory of Intimacy (IMI) were used to assess the variables. Results of correlational analyses revealed significant associations between dimensions of social maturity and intimacy. Strong correlations were identified between responsibility and emotional support ($r = .44, p < .01$), tolerance and mutual understanding ($r = .45, p < .01$), as well as between self-development and time spent together ($r = .48, p < .01$). Positive thinking was significantly associated with affectivity ($r = .46, p < .01$) and general relationship evaluation ($r = .43, p < .01$). These results suggest that social maturity plays an important role in developing and maintaining satisfying intimate relationships. The study's implications are relevant for developing intervention programs focused on improving social competencies and the quality of interpersonal relationships among students.

Keywords: social maturity, intimacy, interpersonal relationships, students, social competencies

1. INTRODUCTION

The transition to adulthood represents a crucial stage in an individual's psychosocial development, marked by intensive explorations of personal identity and the development of the capacity to form and maintain significant intimate relationships. This period, termed "emerging adulthood" in the scientific literature, extends approximately between the ages of 18 and 29 and is characterized by major transformations across multiple life domains (Arnett, 2000; Syed & McLean, 2017).

In this context, social maturity emerges as an essential multidimensional construct that reflects an individual's capacity to function effectively within social relationships and responsibilities (Monahan et al., 2009). It encompasses three fundamental components: behavioural and decisional autonomy (manifested through the ability to make independent decisions and take responsibility for one's

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actions), interpersonal competence (which includes the ability to develop healthy social relationships and communicate effectively), and social responsibility (reflected in adherence to social norms and constructive contribution to the community).

Parallel to the development of social maturity, intimacy emerges as a complex concept, defined by the capacity to develop and maintain close relationships. Recent research demonstrates that this capacity includes emotional, behavioural, cognitive, and identity components (Debrot et al., 2012), all contributing to the formation and maintenance of significant intimate relationships.

In Romania's specific context, where social and economic transformations over recent decades have substantially modified the traditional path to adulthood (Negru-Subțirică et al., 2017), students represent a particular group of young adults simultaneously facing academic challenges and personal development. The university period coincides with key moments in identity formation and first significant experiences in the sphere of intimacy.

Existing research suggests that higher levels of social maturity may facilitate the formation and maintenance of deeper and more satisfying intimate relationships (Barry et al., 2009). However, the precise understanding of how different dimensions of social maturity influence the development of intimacy remains incomplete, particularly within the specific Romanian cultural context.

Socio-economic conditions play a significant role in the development and manifestation of intimacy during emerging adulthood (Xie et al., 2022). Research indicates that financial instability and economic pressures can significantly affect young people's ability to develop and maintain satisfying intimate relationships (Halford & Lucas-Thompson, 2021). In the Romanian context, where many young adults face challenges such as unemployment, prolonged cohabitation with parents, and difficulties in achieving financial independence (Sandu et al., 2018), these factors can significantly influence the timing and quality of intimate relationships. Studies show that economic insecurity can lead to the postponement of important relationship decisions and can generate tensions within existing partnerships (Coțofană & Ștefănescu, 2020). Moreover, socio-economic disparities can influence access to educational resources and personal development opportunities that are crucial for forming the necessary competencies in building and maintaining mature intimate relationships.

In the scientific literature, personal maturity is conceptualized as a manifestation of human development, reflecting an individual's capacity for continuous evolution while maintaining their uniqueness (Kovalevskaya, 2013). This perspective is enriched by Erikson's (1996) contribution, which highlights the defining characteristics of a mature personality: individuality, independence, originality, and the capacity to internalize social norms (Syed & McLean, 2017).

The structure of personal maturity comprises three essential components: personal (value system), reflexive (ego identity), and functional (self-organization) (Wood et al., 2018). Recent research demonstrates that these dimensions are complemented by specific indicators of social maturity, conceptualized as the degree of socialization and capacity for assimilation of socio-cultural norms (Bleidorn et al., 2020). The evaluation criteria proposed by Esser and colleagues

(1991) include aspects such as realistic life planning, independence from parents and peer groups, and the capacity to establish meaningful interpersonal connections.

In this context, responsibility emerges as a fundamental indicator of maturity, manifesting through an individual's capacity to assume the consequences of their actions (Roberts et al., 2018). This is complemented by tolerance, which encompasses both sensory dimensions (resistance to unfavourable social factors) and dispositional aspects (attitudes in social interactions) (Allemand et al., 2015).

Self-actualization, conceptualized by A. Maslow, represents an essential component of mature personality, characterized by the need for continuous development and self-improvement (Martela & Riekk, 2018). Contemporary studies highlight that this manifests through characteristics such as efficient perception of reality, self-acceptance and acceptance of others, spontaneity, and autonomy.

Positive thinking and independence complete the picture of personal maturity, with the former facilitating focus on opportunities and resources, while the latter reflects the capacity for autonomous action and judgment. These dimensions significantly contribute to the development and maintenance of satisfactory interpersonal relationships, a central aspect of this study.

Thus, social maturity, through its essential dimensions - responsibility, tolerance, self-development, positive thinking, and independence - represents a fundamental construct in the development of interpersonal relationships among young adults. Understanding how these components of social maturity associate with the capacity to establish and maintain intimate relationships among students becomes particularly relevant for psychological practice. In this context, the present study aims to specifically investigate the relationship between dimensions of social maturity and intimacy in a sample of Romanian students, thereby contributing to clarifying the role of social maturity in developing satisfactory intimate relationships during young adulthood.

2. OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESES

2.1. OBJECTIVE

The general objective was to investigate the relationship between dimensions of social maturity and the capacity for developing intimacy in social relationships among Romanian students.

The study objectives were:

1. Assessment of social maturity levels across five dimensions (Responsibility, Tolerance, Self-development, Positive thinking, Independence) among Romanian students
2. Analysis of social intimacy levels manifested in students' interpersonal relationships, across the six measured dimensions
3. Identification of association patterns between social maturity dimensions and social intimacy components

2.2. HYPOTHESES

General Hypothesis - There exists a significant positive association between the general level of social maturity and the capacity for developing intimacy in social relationships among Romanian students.

H1: The Responsibility dimension of social maturity is positively associated with levels of Emotional Support and General Relationship Evaluation (individuals displaying high levels of responsibility are more likely to provide consistent emotional support and maintain relationships evaluated as satisfactory).

H2: The level of Tolerance is positively correlated with dimensions of Mutual Understanding and Personal Disclosure and Sharing (individuals with high tolerance levels demonstrate greater openness to others' perspectives and facilitate authentic interpersonal exchanges).

H3: Self-development Capacity shows a positive association with Time Spent Together and Personal Disclosure (individuals oriented toward personal development invest more time in their relationships and demonstrate greater openness in sharing personal experiences).

H4: Positive Thinking is positively correlated with Affectivity and Emotional Closeness, as well as General Relationship Evaluation, meaning an optimistic perspective facilitates the development of emotional connections and contributes to positive relationship evaluation.

H5: The Independence dimension shows a positive relationship with capacity for Personal Disclosure and Sharing (individuals with high levels of independence are more comfortable sharing personal experiences, having greater internal security).

3. METHOD

3.1. PARTICIPANTS

A total of 245 participants were randomly assigned, aged between 19 and 24 years ($M = 22.5$, $SD = 2.8$), with 51% female representation.

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards. All participants were informed, and participation was voluntary without monetary compensation.

3.2. MEASURES

Personal Maturity Questionnaire (Rujenkov, 2016). Psychometric instrument assessing five principal dimensions of personal maturity: Responsibility, Tolerance, Self-development, Positive thinking, Independence.

The Assessment of Social Intimacy (Miller & Lefcourt, 1982). Standardized measure evaluating social intimacy across six constituent dimensions: Temporal investment in relationships, Personal disclosure and experiential sharing, Affective expression and emotional proximity, Reciprocal comprehension, Emotional support provision, Global relationship assessment.

4. RESULTS

4.1. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND INTERCORRELATIONS

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and internal consistency coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) for all investigated variables. Scores on social maturity dimensions ranged from M = 3.45 (SD = 0.78) for Independence to M = 3.98 (SD = 0.65) for Responsibility. Regarding intimacy dimensions, mean scores ranged from M = 3.32 (SD = 0.82) for Personal disclosure and sharing to M = 3.89 (SD = 0.71) for General relationship evaluation. Internal consistency coefficients showed satisfactory values for all scales, ranging from $\alpha = .72$ to $\alpha = .88$.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and reliability coefficients for all variables

Variables	M	SD	α
Social Maturity Dimensions			
1. Responsibility	3.98	0.65	.84
2. Tolerance	3.67	0.72	.79
3. Self-development	3.82	0.7	.81
4. Positive thinking	3.56	0.75	.77
5. Independence	3.45	0.78	.72
Intimacy Dimensions			
6. Time spent together	3.65	0.82	.83
7. Personal disclosure	3.32	0.84	.85
8. Affection	3.78	0.69	.88
9. Mutual understanding	3.71	0.73	.82
10. Emotional support	3.85	0.68	.86
11. Overall assessment	3.89	0.71	.84

Note: M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; α = Cronbach's alpha

Correlational Analysis

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationships between all study variables, testing the proposed hypotheses. Table 2 presents the complete correlation matrix.

Table 2. Intercorrelation Matrix between Social Maturity and Intimacy Dimensions

Var.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.RS	-									
2.TL	.35**	-								
3.SD	.42**	.38**	-							
4.PT	.29**	.31**	.45**	-						
5.IN	.25**	.28**	.39**	.33**	-					
6. TM	.22*	.25**	.48**	.27**	.21*	-				
7.DS	.19*	.42**	.45**	.23	.38**	.41**	-			
8.AF	.28**	.29**	.31**	.46**	.24*	.39**	.44**	-		
9.MU	.31**	.45**	.33	.32	.26	.35	.47	.43	-	
10.ES	.44**	.33**	.29**	.35**	.22*	.38**	.36**	.42**	.45**	-
11. OV	.41**	.28**	.32**	.43**	.25**	.36**	.38**	.49**	.41**	.47**

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$ 1. RS – Responsibility, 2. TL – Tolerance, 3. SD - Self-development, 4. PT - Positive thinking, 5. IN – Independence, 6. TM - Time spent together, 7. DS - Personal disclosure, 8. AF – Affection, 9. MU - Mutual understanding, 10. ES - Emotional support, 11. OV - Overall assessment

4.2. INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

Statistical analyses revealed significant patterns of association between social maturity dimensions and intimacy dimensions, providing empirical support for most of the hypotheses.

The first hypothesis (H1) was confirmed through strong correlations identified between Responsibility and the dimensions of Emotional Support ($r = .44$, $p < .01$) and General Relationship Evaluation ($r = .41$, $p < .01$). These results suggest that individuals who demonstrate high levels of responsibility tend to be more consistent in providing emotional support and develop relationships that are evaluated as more satisfying. This association may be explained by the fact that responsibility involves commitment to and maintenance of interpersonal engagements, which contributes to relationship stability and quality.

The second hypothesis (H2) was supported by significant correlations between Tolerance and the dimensions of Mutual Understanding ($r = .45$, $p < .01$) and Personal Disclosure ($r = .42$, $p < .01$). These results indicate that individuals with high levels of tolerance demonstrate greater capacity to understand and accept others' perspectives, thus facilitating authentic interpersonal exchanges. Tolerance appears to create a safe psychological space for personal disclosure and development of mutual understanding.

For the third hypothesis (H3), data confirm the positive association between Self-development and the dimensions of Time Spent Together ($r = .48$, $p < .01$) and Personal Disclosure ($r = .45$, $p < .01$). These strong correlations suggest that orientation toward personal development is associated with greater investment in interpersonal relationships, both quantitatively (time) and qualitatively (depth of exchanges). It is possible that individuals focused on self-development perceive interpersonal relationships as opportunities for personal growth.

The fourth hypothesis (H4) was confirmed through significant correlations between Positive Thinking and the dimensions of Affectivity ($r = .46$, $p < .01$) and General Relationship Evaluation ($r = .43$, $p < .01$). These results suggest that an optimistic perspective facilitates the development of emotional connections and contributes to a more favourable evaluation of relationships. Positive thinking may function as a protective factor in relationships, allowing individuals to manage interpersonal challenges more effectively.

Regarding the final hypothesis (H5), it was partially confirmed through the moderate correlation between Independence and Personal Disclosure ($r = .38$, $p < .01$). This association suggests that individuals with high levels of independence feel more comfortable sharing personal experiences, possibly due to stronger internal security and reduced fear of negative evaluation.

It is important to note the general pattern of correlations, which indicates that all social maturity dimensions are positively associated with at least several aspects of intimacy, suggesting that social maturity development may be an important factor in the ability to form and maintain satisfying intimate relationships.

An interesting aspect is that social maturity dimensions show differentiated correlations with intimacy aspects, suggesting that different components of social maturity may contribute in specific ways to the development and maintenance of intimate relationships. This has important implications for interventions focused on developing social and relational competencies.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The present study investigated the relationship between dimensions of social maturity and intimacy in a sample of Romanian students, contributing to the enrichment of literature in the field of interpersonal relationship psychology. The results provide empirical support for significant associations between the two constructs and highlight the importance of social maturity in developing and maintaining satisfying intimate relationships.

Correlational analysis revealed distinct patterns of association between various dimensions of social maturity and aspects of intimacy. Responsibility proved to be closely linked to the capacity to provide emotional support and positive relationship evaluation, while tolerance showed strong associations with mutual understanding and personal disclosure. These results suggest that different aspects of social maturity contribute specifically to the quality of interpersonal relationships.

An important finding of the study is the significant association between self-development orientation and relationship investment, manifested both through time spent together and level of personal disclosure. This finding underscores the importance of personal growth motivation in the context of relational development. Additionally, positive thinking proved to be a relevant factor in developing emotional connections and general relationship evaluation, suggesting its potential protective role in maintaining significant relationships.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to understanding the mechanisms through which social maturity influences the quality of interpersonal relationships, providing support for models that emphasize the importance of personal development in the relational context. At a practical level, the results can guide the development of intervention programs focused on improving social competencies and interpersonal relationship quality among students.

Future research would benefit from adopting a longitudinal design to explore causal relationships between social maturity and intimacy, as well as including objective measurements and evaluations from relationship partners. Additionally, extending the study to other age groups and cultural contexts could provide a more complete picture of social maturity's role in intimate relationship development.

Overall, this study highlights the central role of social maturity in developing and maintaining satisfying intimate relationships, offering valuable implications for psychology practitioners and for developing educational programs focused on improving students' social and relational competencies.

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