



RESEARCH ARTICLE / ARAŞTIRMA YAZISI

Ideal and Received Affection Discrepancy: Investigating the Pathway to Unfulfilled Relationships

İdeal ve Alınan Sevgi Uyuşmazlığı: Tatmin Edilmemiş İlişkilere Giden Yolun Araştırılması

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Abstract:

With the increasing frequency and openness of dating relationships in Indian culture, there has been a corresponding rise in reports of unhappiness and heartbreaks. The concept of affection, which carries the power to give and receive love, reveal attachment wounds, and complicate relationship dynamics, may play a significant role in these challenges. Therefore, this research aimed to target the underpinnings of romantic relationships by studying the foundation of a relationship on which it is built and maintained. Hence, the experience of individuals who are struggling with affection discrepancy and simultaneously coping with challenges such as the perceived fading of affection, which can result in unhealthy dynamics, was studied. Using Phenomenology, the data was obtained through in-depth, one on one interviews with 12 individuals in dating relationships, who have experienced the affection discrepancy, and dealt with the fading of affection. Results highlight the elements of ideal affection, the disparity between received, vs expected affection, participants' contribution towards unfulfilled relationships, and common coping behaviors. The findings revealed that many participants had lowered their personal standards of affection. and settled for the bare minimum, or “just enough” love they received from their partners. The study also identified a pathway leading towards unfulfilled relationships and emotional exhaustion, shedding light on patterns of unhealthy relationships. The article concludes by discussing the limitations and directions for future research.

Keywords: Affection, self-betrayal, fading love, attachment wounds, unmet expectations, coping

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Öz:

Hint kültüründe flört ilişkilerinin artan sıklığı ve açıklığıyla birlikte, mutsuzluk ve kalp kırıklığı raporlarında buna karşılık gelen bir artış olmuştur. Sevgi verme ve alma gücünü taşıyan, bağlanma yaralarını ortaya çıkaran, ilişki dinamiklerini karmaşıklaştıran sevgi kavramı bu zorluklarda önemli bir rol oynayabilir. Bu nedenle, bu araştırma, romantik ilişkilerin üzerine inşa edildiği ve sürdürüldüğü bir ilişkinin temellerini inceleyerek, romantik ilişkilerin temellerini hedeflemeyi amaçlamıştır. Bu nedenle, duygulanım tutarsızlığıyla mücadele eden ve aynı zamanda sağlıklı dinamiklere yol açabilen duygulanımın algılanan solması gibi zorluklarla başa çıkan bireylerin deneyimleri incelenmiştir. Fenomenoloji kullanılarak, flört ilişkilerinde, duygulanım tutarsızlığını yaşamış ve duygulanımın azalmasıyla uğraşan 12 kişiyle derinlemesine, bire bir görüşmeler yoluyla veriler elde edilmiştir. Sonuçlar, ideal sevginin unsurlarını, alınan ve beklenen sevgi arasındaki eşitsizliği, katılımcıların tamamlanmamış ilişkilere katkısını ve ortak başa çıkma davranışlarını vurgulamaktadır. Bulgular, birçok katılımcının kişisel sevgi standartlarını düşürdüğünü ortaya koymuştur. Bireyler, partnerlerinden aldıkları asgari veya "yeterli" sevgiye razı olmuştur. Çalışma ayrıca, sağlıklı ilişki kalıplarına ışık tutan, yerine getirilmemiş ilişkilere ve duygusal tükenmeye neden olan bir yol belirledi. Makale, gelecekteki araştırmalar için sınırlamaları ve yönergeleri tartışmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sevgi, kendine ihanet etmek, solan aşk, bağlanma yaraları, karşılanmayan beklentiler, başa çıkma

Introduction

Affection is the desire to love, and be loved by others (Rubin et al., 1988, p. 605), which is vital for building, and maintaining intimate relationships (Dainton et al., 1994; Knapp & Vangelisti, 1996). It is defined as the “need for positive regard from another and the feeling of positive regard for another, communicated through affectionate behaviors” (Pendell, 2002). Affection is in the gestures, non-verbal’s, communication, discussing imagined future (Marston et al., 1987), vulnerability, and reciprocity, which communicates the underlying message of reassurances i.e., I see you, I hear you, I support you and I value you (Floyd, 1997) despite the flaws. Studies (Horan, & Booth 2013, 2011) has found the existence of deceptive affection in relationships to preserve relationship stability. Many researchers have concluded the impact of low self-esteem on relationships, such as, it leads to less than desired expression of affection, projecting insecurities, and believing that the given affection is not making a difference in their partners emotional/ relational experience (Berk et al., 2008). Therefore, partners with lower self-esteem negatively interpret their partner’s affection and have difficulty accepting or receiving affection (Swann, 1997). Adult attachment theory provides a framework that highlights the ways people connect with their partners, and helps them in understanding the comfort with which they can relate to others for support and security (Fraley & Shaver, 2000; Bowlby, 1973). When two people unite to form a relationship, they are not just bringing the best of themselves, but also their emotional baggage that profoundly influence the relationship (Schwartz, 2018). Every Individual carries an internal working model in adult relationships (Pietromonaco & Beck, 2015) that reflects through their way of hoping, setting, and communicating needs or expectations. It is not just the nature of the expectations but the discrepancy between what is expected and within relationship experiences (reality) that determines the relationship satisfaction (Miller & Tedder, 2011; Lemay & Venaglia, 2016), commitment, and future of the relationship. Also, the way an individual selects their partners and shows up

in a relationship makes a huge impact on the dynamics of a relationship (Pharaon, 2022a). Seeking love from a disempowered place often leads to, co-dependency, self-sabotaging, ego love, or fantasy bonds. These are some of the ways worthiness wounds activates to feel loved, validated and secure (LePera, 2022).

The goal of this phenomenological study was understanding the dysfunctional relationship dynamics among dating couples through in-depth interviews within India. Historically, relationships were not looked at the way it is looked at in modern society and India is no exception to it. The relationship is talked about and looked upon differently than before which has brought forward the rapidly changing dynamics of relationships which are also prevalent in the dating culture. This research can be used to understand not just the symptoms but also the cause of the rising relationship failures by studying micro-behavioural actions that act as a catalyst of later conflicts in relationships. New understandings of this phenomenon of fading of affection and its causes could have implications for the many Indians who at one point or another find themselves in love, and wish to make it work, or preserve the relationship. Therefore, with the rapidly changing dynamics of relationships and dating culture in modern Indian society, it is crucial to understand the root causes of rising relationship failures, rather than just the symptoms. By exploring factors such as idea of affection, past influence, expectations, differentiation, attachment wounds and other factors that actually present itself in myriad ways will help in establishing the cause of the complexities of the relationship and with what understanding an individual even enters the relationship. Therefore, the following research questions were addressed:

- 1.What is the discrepancy between the ideal, and the received affection?
- 2.Which strategies and efforts were used to cope with or remedy the lost affection?
- 3.What factors contributed towards the experience of unfulfilled relationships?.

Methods

Qualitative method was used via in-depth interviews to examine the lived experiences of giving, and receiving affection among people in dating relationships (Creswell, 2013). This approach helped us give insight into the relationship dynamics through direct experiences as the lack of literature called for inductive approach. Given that research is scant in understanding rising dating relationships complexities, the present research also aimed at identifying the pathway towards unfulfilled relationships whilst highlighting the foundation of the relationships.

Purpose and snowball sampling techniques were employed to obtain data. The sample space of 12 participants from Indian ethnic origin were considered. The individuals considered for the study were those who defined themselves as experiencing and dealing with fading of affection and related concerns in their dating relationships. Snowball sampling was also used to reach out to potential participants through networking via an email and WhatsApp messages requesting referrals, participants, and other acquaintances. Once the participants confirmation was received, they were screened for assuring that they meet the inclusion criteria through pre-screening questions which indicated if they ever experienced the fading affection, had difficulty dealing with it, their age was above 22 years, and should be having, or have had a relationship of at least 6 months or more.

Demographics of Participants

The sample consisted of 12 participants, who shared their experience of the fading affection over the period of time in their relationship. Participants who were in a relationship presently also included the ones, who were not sure about whether to stay or leave the relationship. It is imperative to note that out of the 12 participants, 2 were in healthy and 10 were in unhealthy/ dysfunctional relationships. The participants were Indian, residing in different states of the country, and were reported as heterosexuals. The age group of the participants ranged from 23-30 years of age. The length of the relationships ranged from 7 months to 7 years.

Procedure

Due to the nature of the research topic, phenomenological approach was adopted for the investigation. On receiving approval from Galgotias University's Institutional Review Board, reference number- AB/GU- 19SAHS3010004, in-depth interviews were conducted to study the experiences and perceptions of a number of adults who had reported dealing with fading affection with their dating partners. Prior to conducting the study, ethical considerations were kept as a priority. The safety, confidentiality, and consent of the participants were taken into account, for which the informed consent was signed by the participants prior to conducting the interviews. To maintain confidentiality, the data sets used pseudonyms to avoid any form of ethical issues and client violation. Each interviewee was given an invite that highlighted the purpose, procedure, risks, benefits, and voluntary nature of the study.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted that averaged 90 minutes each via zoom after the consent form was signed. The risks, benefits, and ethical considerations were laid down beforehand. As an objective was to understand the underpinnings of romantic relationships

and how affection evolves over the period of time, participants were asked questions pertaining to their understanding on affection, relationship in the initial phase, intermediate phase, end phase, and the coping of the perceived fading of affection. The interview guide was followed, and probes were asked based on the individual's responses. These are some common examples of probes that helped the participant understand, interpret, and respond to the question. The respondent was followed and the guide was not strictly adhered to. Probing and follow-up questions were conducted based on the additional information provided about their relationship story, while maintaining the interview's sense and direction. Few questions are presented below as examples:

1. What does affection mean to you in the relationship?
2. How did you initially experience affection through your partner in any form?
3. Whenever you felt connected in those moments, what were your thoughts/perceptions regarding yourself, your partner, and the relationship?
4. Over the period of time, were there any changes in the effort made by your partner to show affection towards you?
5. How did you cope with the feelings of perceived threat?

After every interview, field notes were written which were important for the analyses and as an additional data source. Sem-structure interview format was opted to gain deeper insights. The basic structure remained the same i.e., the questions were similar to all the participants with different probes, additions, or deleting based on their individual differences and uniqueness in the sharing process. To complete the study with accuracy, thoroughness, and quality strategies such as member checks, detailed insightful descriptions of the data, and reflexivity to validate the data were added.

Data analysis

The recording was transcribed after conducting the interviews, and the most important parts of the responses were sifted through. The complete process of content analysis was followed (Bengtsson, 2016) i.e., decontextualization, recontextualization, categorization, and compilation, that led to the emergence of themes representing a common meaning within the data set. Additionally, binary coding and plotting were done for feelings and behaviours to understand the evolution of relationship over the period of time which was categorized as T1 (initial), T2 (intermediate), and T3 (final/ present). After the categorization, the binary scoring method was adopted to tabulate the data. After binary coding, the sum of all the values of 1 and 0 over the sample space was conducted. This gave a clear ensemble average of this study. Once the cumulative index was conducted, the obtained scores of feelings and behaviors using the software GNU plot were plotted.

Results

The results are explained through examples using direct quotations of the participants. These examples are internally cited, and referred in the appendix. They are cited as A, B.1, i.e., the first point of the Appendix B, and so forth.

Table 1. Appendix A: Themes of Ideal Affection Among Participants with Categorized Responses

Themes	Categorized Responses
Consistency/ Integrity	<p>Make plans, and follow through the plans</p> <p>Keep up with the promises made</p> <p>Efforts/ Investment</p> <p>Relationship Rituals</p> <p>Backing I love you (words) with actions</p> <p>Accountability</p> <p>Response to calls, and messages</p> <p>Inform, and update about not able to talk to them, give them time, about their safety, or any decided context</p> <p>Come back, and take initiative after taking space</p> <p>Treating like they did in the beginning</p> <p>Appreciation (compliments, paying attention, presence, looks with interest., shows interest)</p> <p>Attend to the problem, and turn towards it when promised rather than ignoring</p> <p>Not taking for granted</p> <p>Balance between being friends, and lovers</p>
Shared interests	<p>Bonding over common interest (talking, learning, excitement, curiosity)</p> <p>Participating in each other's interest/hobbies</p> <p>Mutual planning for strengthening bond</p> <p>Finding middle ground for each other's choices and inclusivity</p> <p>Showing genuinity in individual interests based on differences</p>
Emotional availability	<p>Sharing good/bad experiences</p> <p>Acknowledgment</p> <p>Expressing love/feelings (verbal, action, N.V.)</p> <p>Warmth</p> <p>Respectful</p> <p>Appreciate Authenticity</p> <p>Validation</p> <p>Sharing emotional experience</p> <p>Peaceful Presence/ providing safe Space</p> <p>Sharing thoughts</p> <p>Not belittling the problems shared</p>

	<p>Turning towards each other</p> <p>Understanding individual worries objectively</p> <p>Accept and understand personal needs</p> <p>Emotional Regulation</p> <p>Giving personal space with love, and understanding</p> <p>Emotional boundaries</p> <p>Assurity (if you need me, I am here during some personal crisis or conflict, support, not forcing one to talk, or share, understand the state of mind, leaving with assurances, and reminders)</p> <p>Being considerate</p>
Support	<p>Being there for each other in need</p> <p>Reliance</p> <p>Non-controlling behavior</p> <p>Consideration and care</p> <p>Protected</p> <p>Standing up for each other</p> <p>Inspire each other's dream</p> <p>Choices and dreams and goals</p> <p>Respect me for who i am today</p> <p>Encourage the important daily events</p> <p>Show that they believe in me</p> <p>Understanding circumstances</p> <p>Respect Independent decisions</p> <p>Not add to the concern (not fixing-solution focused)</p> <p>Learning healthy patterns from each other</p> <p>Needs/wants and dreams</p> <p>Know how to agree to disagree without any negative change towards each other</p>
Touch	<p>Hugs</p> <p>Holding hands</p> <p>Sex</p> <p>Eye-contact</p> <p>Cuddling</p> <p>Kissing</p> <p>Unasked/ surprise physical comfort, or affection</p>

<p>Feeling Wanted</p>	<p>Making them feel loved the way they want</p> <p>Check in with them</p> <p>Curiosity around individual differences</p> <p>Letting them know they are thinking of you</p> <p>Showing importance for each other</p> <p>Giving and Receiving (balanced)</p> <p>Reassurance (they are not too much, I am there, I understand, I still love you)</p> <p>Knowing how and what will make "me" happy (love language)</p> <p>Acceptance</p> <p>Intentionally taking out time</p> <p>Genuinity in Communicating and caring for each other in a social group</p> <p>Sharing lovable words</p> <p>Taking out time for each other wilfully (not being too busy every time)</p> <p>Accept, and understand individual ways of feeling happy</p> <p>Thought/intention behind what other does for me</p> <p>Romantic Gestures</p> <p>If distant/space and getting back to each other</p> <p>Understanding each other's needs</p> <p>Not assuming every time of them as strong, provide emotional support the way it is required, or asked</p> <p>Repair after conflict</p> <p>Taking interest/ doing things for them that they like despite of them understanding their choices</p> <p>Mutual participation in future talks and certain agreements on some thoughts</p> <p>Taking interest in the family</p> <p>Show love openly and honestly Infront of friends (holding hands, talking, not ignorant, respect the presence)</p> <p>Validation confirming that they are enjoying your company and having a good time too (assuring)</p>
<p>Spontaneity</p>	<p>Surprises</p> <p>Going above and beyond sometimes</p> <p>Reveals real you, certain parts of them unseen</p> <p>Random check ins</p> <p>Random expression of feeling</p> <p>Suddenly remembering small details, and doing those little things once mentioned</p>

	Unexpected imagined future talk
Attentiveness/ Presence	<p>Pampering</p> <p>Undistracted/ focus when talking or sharing</p> <p>Building meaningful time</p> <p>Observant about you</p> <p>Acting based on love language</p> <p>Being fully there with me (mindful)</p> <p>When and how to check in with each other</p> <p>Attention to make me feel that everything is okay</p> <p>Focus on me when low or hurting, prioritize the feelings</p> <p>Reciprocity</p> <p>Encourage often</p> <p>Real presence, not obligatory</p> <p>Talk and connect without distraction, or divided attention on the phone</p> <p>Balance between spacing and talking</p> <p>Appreciate efforts behind anything we do for each other</p> <p>A good conversation surrounding “us”</p> <p>Understanding each other’s state of mind</p>
Listening/ Empathy	<p>Need Fulfilment</p> <p>Respect individual thoughts and perspective</p> <p>partners Involvement/ participation in a conversation</p> <p>Understand what i am asking thorough my sharing of information</p> <p>Non-judgement</p> <p>Respecting Individual Space</p> <p>Transparency</p> <p>Responding when communicating, or sharing something important to them (N.V)</p> <p>Understanding (Mutual)</p> <p>Safe space to calm oneself</p> <p>Listen/discuss rather than blaming</p> <p>Address the concerns raised</p> <p>Notice and regard my feelings</p> <p>Understanding the origin, state, and perception</p>

	<p>Understand my career/ work</p> <p>Attentive response</p> <p>Disagree with respect and understand</p> <p>Allowing space to vent out without immediate fixing or discussion</p> <p>understanding partners perception through which they function</p>
Thoughtful gestures	<p>Remembering Shared information</p> <p>Appreciating & valuing important. Life events</p> <p>Gifts</p> <p>Dates</p> <p>Intentionally making time</p> <p>Helping and noticing the help needed</p> <p>Calls/texts (underlying- I am thinking about you and so on...)</p> <p>Remembering days which have some significance</p> <p>Care/ consideration</p> <p>Small/little gestures (show love)</p> <p>Celebrate small wins/ important events</p> <p>Going a little extra for the other person</p> <p>Making special gestures at times</p> <p>Recalling memories together</p> <p>Initiating conversations, plans, dates, hugs etc.</p> <p>Catch up if we haven't talked properly over some days</p>
Vulnerability	<p>Experiences accepted without judgement</p> <p>Expressing deep honest feelings</p> <p>Sharing real honest feelings and not compromise</p> <p>Affection towards My family, career, past- my world</p> <p>Authenticity</p> <p>Social Treatment towards partner</p> <p>Sharing emotional experience</p> <p>Friendship (not just romance)</p> <p>Honest thoughts around situations, conflicts, or us in general</p> <p>Sharing dreams and goals</p> <p>Showing sides that are risky like insecurities</p>

	<p>Personal deep understanding</p> <p>Private Boundaries</p> <p>Deep heartfelt talks</p> <p>Expressing sense of honesty towards relationship, self and each other</p> <p>Welcome me to be a part of their inner world</p> <p>Include in their important life events</p> <p>Even if we can do things independently, sometimes it's good to rely and convey through actions that "I am there"</p> <p>Intentional Sharing (healthy/unhealthy)</p> <p>Taking responsibility of our actions</p> <p>Share their past experiences to know where they are coming from/ sharing true underlying feelings</p> <p>Easy sharing of disappointments, or hurt caused in the relationship</p> <p>Respecting/ Accepting each other thoughts, likes, dislikes, values</p>
<p>Acknowledgement</p>	<p>Acknowledging their presence in a social group</p> <p>The presence of an issue</p> <p>Personal feelings that emerge due to any situation (conflicts- within, or outside relationship)</p> <p>recognize each other's point of view and feelings</p> <p>Ownership</p> <p>Non-judgement</p> <p>Making space for my choices</p> <p>Knowing what is wanted</p> <p>Appreciation</p> <p>Taking care of what matters to me</p> <p>Presence</p> <p>Individuality</p> <p>Important dates</p> <p>The low days, and state of the mind with verbal assurance, rather than adding the burden</p> <p>Holding space for how differently love and care is shown</p> <p>value and respect each other's time</p> <p>introducing partner to the important friends/people in their life</p> <p>what I like or prefer (love and care)</p> <p>aligned with who I am</p> <p>Need of reflective autonomy and independence</p>

	<p>Doing things wilfully for each other simply because they like it leaving their personal judgments/ comfort or familiarity aside</p> <p>accepting boundaries without making each other feel bad about it</p> <p>Respecting differences around handling busy days, low feelings and texting</p>
<p>Trust and commitment</p>	<p>Confide</p> <p>Reliance/ dependence</p> <p>Standing up for each other</p> <p>Accountability</p> <p>Willingness</p> <p>Choices and decisions</p> <p>Little gestures stimulating trust (e.g., informing of their unavailability)</p> <p>expression of loyalty</p> <p>Responsibility of each other's needs, and feelings</p> <p>Prioritizing</p> <p>collectively talking and visibly investing in future</p> <p>Understanding because its important to them</p> <p>Showing trust, and earning trust</p> <p>Not using moments of sharing as my weakness</p> <p>Circling back to each other after conflicts</p> <p>Giving freedom to each other to be</p>
<p>Power, and Influence</p>	<p>Equality</p> <p>Fairness</p> <p>accepting influence (include in decision making)</p> <p>balanced give and take</p> <p>Impact</p> <p>Accommodate</p> <p>not imposing own likes & dislikes</p> <p>Appreciate reactive autonomy</p> <p>No possessiveness</p> <p>Not trying to change each other</p> <p>Mutual sacrifice, compromises as and when needed with will, and greater meaning</p>

Communication (conflict focused)	<p>Open</p> <p>Honest</p> <p>Clear</p> <p>Empathetic</p> <p>Understanding</p> <p>Awareness</p> <p>Mature</p> <p>Reassurance on problems</p> <p>Knowing each other's conflict handling</p> <p>Pause and hold back hurtful comments</p> <p>Express without fear the needs, and wants, or expectations</p> <p>Talk out and solve conflicts openly</p> <p>Let go at times certain conflicts</p>
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Table 2. Appendix B: Direct Textual Data for Analysis

Elements of ideal affection	Direct quoted examples
1.	<p>Akanksha shared, "Affection, for me doesn't mean that he needs to repetitively say he loves me, but rather it means the smallest of the gestures like his observation or attention to details".</p> <p>Shivanshu mentioned "affection is how much the other person want to push themselves to show their love under any circumstances".</p> <p>Shivani defined affection as something "that comes with the degree of responsibility towards another person".</p> <p>Monica shared, "people show affection differently, but if they do something for you, anything particular, doing it consistently is a sign of affection".</p>
2.	<p>Tanya mentioned, "I would like to be noticed, complimented upon, looked at. I want my partner to ask me how my day was... basically anything that makes me feel that he is there with me".</p>
3.	<p>Monica shared "vulnerability to me is letting the person know what I like, letting them know my insecurities, and expressing emotions".</p> <p>Sanaya shared "expressing the needs, desires, wants, dislikes and specifically important things from the past that can impact our relationship are the most important things for me".</p>
4.	<p>Sanaya mentioned "I would not want either overtly affectionate people, or emotionally distant people, I look for people who will let me know they love me, and occasionally do things to show me that they still do, it validates and assures me which is sufficient".</p> <p>Tanya shared "if I am not having a nice day, I would want my partner to care but not force me to share, until I am myself ready".</p>

5.	<p>Shivanshu shared “whatever I used to get in the form of affection, was good enough for me... whenever I have tried to get the affection in the way I want, the expectations were never met, which makes me feel disappointed or as if I’m asking for too much which I shouldn’t”.</p> <p>Shivanshu also shared “I don’t want to expect much from my partner, because I don’t want too much of affection as I can just adjust with less”</p>
6.	<p>Kiara shared “if you are having a fight or an argument, sit down and talk about it, escaping it and letting it go to avoid the conflict, isn’t a solution, we need to come to a conclusion... so we both know that what we are okay with and what we aren’t”.</p>
7.	<p>Akanksha illustrated “Affection shouldn’t just extend to me but also the world I have built for myself...my partner should also be affectionate towards my family, my career... Showing affection towards me as I would towards him and his life”.</p>
Coping Behaviour	
8.	<p>Tanya shared “I used to do things on purpose that he didn’t like if I do, to get the attention, or make him feel bad, and chase me a little”.</p> <p>Meera shared “I often exaggerated situations to get his attention because I needed him”.</p> <p>Akanksha shared that, “If he acts indifferent towards me, or doesn’t talk to me after conflicts, I go out of the house, and not come back until he calls me to check in if I am okay... to get his attention, so he cares”.</p>
9.	<p>Sulekha shared “I didn’t like myself doing things to keep him stay but I did, to please him or have a peaceful relationship”.</p> <p>Tanya shared “I gave everything in my power to not lose him... I changed myself, overlooked faults, forgave, lost myself, and faked happiness”.</p>
Pathway towards experiencing the unfulfilled relationships	
10.	<p>“It is just a phase”.</p> <p>“My partner isn’t much expressive as it is”.</p> <p>“My partner will change if I make him/her happy”.</p> <p>“My partner needs time to trust me or open up to me”.</p>
11.	<p>Common Phrases such as-</p> <p>“I would feel complete if they love me”,</p>

	<p>“One shouldn’t have any expectations in the relationships”,</p> <p>“Sacrificing oneself is okay”,</p> <p>“Commitment means sticking around even if it doesn’t serve you”, or</p> <p>“Giving more can fix the relationships”.</p>
12.	<p>Common Phrases:</p> <p>“If I will please my partner, they will always stay beside me”.</p> <p>“To keep the relationship intact, I must do whatever makes my partner happy”.</p> <p>“If I hide my true emotions, I would be loved more”.</p>
13.	<p>Common Phrases:</p> <p>“I used to feel guilty after doing something I didn’t want”.</p> <p>“I started doubting everyone’s intention towards me”.</p> <p>“I stopped taking care of myself”.</p> <p>“I don’t think my existence matters”.</p> <p>“I didn’t know if my thoughts were even real”.</p> <p>“I lost my individuality”.</p>
14.	<p>Akanksha shared, “I started seeing him for who he is, not who I thought he might be, or could be”.</p> <p>Shivanshu shared, “I realized I have become so accustomed to her behaviour... I had accepted that this is going to end”.</p>
15.	<p>Common Phrases:</p> <p>“I didn’t care anymore; it is the way it is”.</p> <p>“I didn’t think I love my partner anymore”.</p> <p>“I don’t want to make any out of the way efforts to give, or get affection”.</p>

Note. Pseudonyms are used to maintain the confidentiality of the subjects while describing the common patterns found among the interviewees

Research Question 1: What is the discrepancy between the ideal, and the received affection?

Elements of ideal/ expected affection

The results elicited 15 common themes containing similar set of responses, namely, (a) consistency/ integrity, (b) shared interests, (c) emotional availability, (d) support, (e) touch, (f) feeling wanted, (g) spontaneity, (h) attentiveness/ presence, (I) Listening/ empathy, (j)

thoughtful gestures, (k) vulnerability, (l) acknowledgment, (m) trust and commitment, (n) power/ influence, and (o) communication (See, Appendix A). Participants described affection in various ways such as, love backed up with action, going beyond the comfort for another, not giving up on each-other during difficult times, or taking responsibility of each-other’s feelings (A, B.1). Participants shared, it makes them feel assured, wanted, and loved, especially when it continues after the

“newness” fades away. Every participant had an idea of affection wrapped in the genuinity of little gestures towards them such as checking in, laughing along, remembering small details, considering what’s important to them, etc (A, B.2). Participants also talked about the importance of vulnerability in their relationships. Even though they ideally defined showing up with vulnerability in relationship (A, B.3), their actual relationships contained boundaryless, intentional and misdefined vulnerable moments to secure connection, and seek validation. Most of the participants also shared wanting to be embraced for who they are, along with their flaws, so they can share openly without the fear of any unpleasant change, or potential risk in the relationship. Few participants sought for balanced affection (A, B.4) such as, between caring vs. possessiveness, dating vs. friendship, or emotionally available vs. individual space. There were also participants whose unhealed wounds from the past relationships had made them detached with their needs of affection (A, B.5). This was reflected in their relationships in the form of conflicts (within, and between). Most of the responses included easy communication, emotional availability and conflict handling as a must for affectionate exchanges in a relationship (A, B.6). The essence of such responses lied in the creation of safe space, ability to express freely, and hold opinions without feeling criticized, judged, or demeaned. Few people explicitly mentioned affection involving taking interest in their world wholeheartedly with curiosity (A, B.7).

When asked about how important it is for them that their partner shows affection towards them, there were some contradictory ratings as compared to their ideal affection standards. Most of the participants rated low, to moderately important. They justified their ratings with reasons such as, setting high standards are futile, reinforce possessiveness, having affection standards are bound to bring disappointment, too cliché to ask for meeting their needs, and can’t be perceived as needy.

Received Affection vs Expected affection

The relationship was divided into initial, intermediate, and end phase of the relationship to measure the discrepancy in received, and expected affection. In the beginning of the relationship few common ways of affectionate communication that participants received by their partners were found, i.e., consistency, curiosity, expression of love, emotional availability, public acknowledgment, reassurance, appreciation/ acknowledgment, investment/ participation, communication, healthy compromise, and commitment/ integrity. Out of 12 participants, majority of them shared receiving all the affection they ever needed, but only until the initial phase. Opposing to which, they also mentioned that whatever they were receiving since the beginning was good enough even if it didn’t really match their ideal affection. This contradiction is explained by four possible reasons that unfolded with their narratives. One, choosing the false self over the real self because of past relationship experiences; two, the intense need of feeling wanted, validated, and reciprocated through their partner’s was much more important than the feelings of not being wanted; three, convincing partners to choose them via pretence (Believing that it is necessary to be someone other than oneself in order to be liked); and fourth, difficulty being vocal about their needs, and boundaries because of low self-worth. Few participants who explicitly stated not receiving affection in a way they would prefer even in the initial stages, but they rationalized

their disappointments as they were feeling loved, assured, and complete like never before. It was observed that for all the participants the response of receiving consistent affection changed to receiving occasional to no affection by the end phase of the relationship. The initial affectionate gestures were replaced by lack of efforts, manipulation, emotional unavailability, pocketing, and unhealthy conflicts by the intermediate phase. Most of the participants shared the feelings of guilt, and anger towards themselves for avoiding these early signs in the beginning. For them, their partners gestures made them feel safe, and worthy enough, irrespective of whether it is something they would want in the long run to continue feeling loved. Whenever there was a negatively associated emotion in any stage of their relationship, they played safe, and held back their authentic responses due to fear of rejection. Eventually the discrepancy was unavoidable due to the difficulty coping with the change, and distress. All the participants spent their days, trying to minimize the discrepancy by using certain coping mechanisms until the point of no return i.e., acceptance, and deterioration. By the end phase of the relationship the participants were burned out due to consistent self-abandonment without any desired outcome.

Research Question 2: Which strategies and efforts were used to cope with or remedy the lost affection?

Emotional drama: This was practised when participants felt out of control due to difficulty communicating their needs, and managing conflicts. Emotional drama was temporarily stimulating in terms of feeling connected, or supported in some way from their partners. As the affection started to change many participants started to create emotional drama of various kinds to seek attention, solve their doubts, or feel like their partner still cares for them. Protesting behaviour, and passive aggression were major forms of emotional drama exercised by the participants (A, B.8). Emotional drama was also used to test their partners i.e., to find whether they still like them, or if whatever worst the participants assumed due to increased discrepancy in affection was true or not.

Self-abandonment/ Persistent self-betrayal: The self-sabotaging patterns found among participants were-sacrificing own needs, wants, or interests, downplaying partners hurtful actions, absence of self-care, hiding true emotions, and avoiding setting boundaries. Participants shared their moments of realizations about how affection wasn’t ideal, its negative consequences, and the choices they made to keep their partners in the relationship. Participants whose partners deceived them, ended up giving multiple chances out of a feeling that this time they might get love. The participants shared increase in self-doubt as they had started to second guess themselves, went against their intuition, and chased their partners by suppressing their real feelings (A, B.9).

Holding onto despite mistreatment: Participants even though suffering, still held onto the hope as their partners gave them inconsistent affection. Another reason was because of fear of losing attachment, and strong fantasies they visualized with their partners. Participants when noticed the discrepancy in the beginning they were confident of fixing it by being the reason of change for their partners. Most of the responses carried the underlying meaning of “if I love them harder, they will treat me better”, and the mistreatment, or neglect was often rationalized till the very end (A, B.10). The participants

shared that the bare minimum was enough for them to continue the relationship at that point in time as they didn't know their way out.

Research Questions 3: What factors contributed towards the experience of unfulfilled relationship?

This contains the factors pertaining to participants that might have contributed to the intense experience of increased affection discrepancy, fading of affection and above all towards weak foundation of the relationship. The following factors emerged from the participants responses-

(a) Participants carried their individual attributes (i.e., self-esteem, needs, expectations, emotional health, communication style, coping skills), and the impact of past romantic relationships (preconceived notions, patterns). Through the data it was evident that participants had conditional worth, and excessive need of being wanted, and loved. They hesitated to communicate their expectations clearly because of the perceived risk of sabotaging the "good relationship", or appearing "needy" that will make their partner drift apart. The participants responses did elicit some common preconceived notions they were carrying that critically influenced their thoughts, actions, and emotions (A, B.11). These notions also reflect the way they individually defined being in love (A, B.12), which was significantly influenced by their childhood, and adult relationships.

(b) Minimizing/ denying early relationship problems- This factor majorly consisted of all those red flags, that the participants either ignored, denied, or accepted. For participants there were not very visible/ direct red flags, or which weren't "too much of a big deal". They attached certain narratives to the doubts that stirred in their minds in the beginning of the relationship such as- "I don't think my partner will continue doing this in the future", or "I thought I could handle it".

(c) Low affection, higher commitment- It was seen among the participants that more they sensed less affection from their partners, more they over functioned to manage the differences, or perceived threat. The participants shared holding back their feelings, fear, or concerns which also contributed towards the difficulties in setting boundaries. The purpose of over-giving that emerged, despite the noticeable changes in their partners affection was to keep their illusion of love safe, even if they had to create the situation to evoke some responses from their partners.

(d) Enduring the betrayal of trust- The participants developed deep trust in the beginning of the relationship based on the received affection. However, there were many moments of disconnections, that started to break down their trust towards their partner, and within themselves. Some of the moments were- unresponsiveness towards their bids of connection, one-sided emotional work, avoiding hard conversations, boundary violation (unset/ unsaid boundaries), unmet needs, and consistently feeling as if their partner is inaccessible. There were three people who experienced cheating, and on-off break up. Albeit of its awareness, they prolonged the suffering by functioning on the fear, and attachment.

(e) Efforts to fix the partner, and the conflicts- Every problem, or conflict that existed in the relationship became the participants problem to fix. The participants attempt to save the relationship was mainly influenced by the core belief that, if they will neglect their own needs, they will

be easier to love, and worthy of the relationship. The efforts to fix involved self-abandonment such as, partner-pleasing, pursuing, changing self, and over functioning based on what aligns with their illusion/ fantasy. There were also some uncommon efforts such as trying an open relationship, or retaliating in the ways that were harmful to one's health such as drinking, that would evoke some reaction within their partners.

(g) Resigning to control- Participants attempts to express their feelings, and share their concerns/ challenges left them feeling unheard. They reported their partners bombarding them with blame, criticism, and manipulation. The unresolved conflicts started becoming a trigger for the participants, which added on their fear, and destabilized them. It was difficult for participants to see any other option than giving in to the fear, and doing all they could to feel safe. Hence, they started over-complying, and please their partners to secure the same affection that they initially experienced.

h) Loss of sense of self- Participants reported feeling "not like themselves", and increase in self-doubts. They recognized their lost identity, self-confidence, disinterest, and increased isolation. They either internalized, or did everything against their own intuitions to avoid rejection, or abandonment. Many common responses were found that showed lack of self-trust, anxiety, and self-criticism (A, B. 13).

(I) Shattering of illusions/ fantasies: The disillusionment happened in the intermediate phase, but every effort was made to postpone it through denial. By the end phase of the relationship, they couldn't fight it anymore due to mental exhaustion, and loss of hope (A, B. 14). When they finally accepted their disillusionment, deterioration began- red flags were seen as red flags, the affection shown in crumbs were considered being done out of obligation, and feelings of indifference increased.

(j) Lost passion- Participants developed detachment as they stopped seeking consistent validation. The reasons to ignore their real feelings were not valid anymore as they realized the cost of staying in a relationship. Even though they waited on their partners to walk out of the relationship, they were out of love (A, B. 15). Few participants, took this as a hope that their partners would realize on their own if they withhold affection, some understood this feeling as something that they have to settle for in their life, and some participants accepted that their relationships don't withhold any future.

Discussion

This study aimed at understanding how people experience the discrepancy between the expected vs. received affection, and cope with the consequences of fading affection over a period of time in their dating relationship. It was observed that, participants were in unhealthy relationships with complicated dynamics, where patterns of limerence love was evident. This stage has been characterized by various traits such as: anxiety, sexual desire, ecstatic feeling, intrusive thinking, infatuation and unrealistic idealization (Hatfield et al., 2008; Sternberg, 1987). The participants overlooked the flaws or red flags (Crooks & Baur, 2014; Fisher et al., 2006), and rarely misperceived partners attitude towards them (Felmlee, 1995; McClanahan et al., 1990). Even though this type of love fades away once the reality sets in, it was found in the

participants experience that any action that fed their fears of rejection, and questioned their worthiness, was dismissed through minimization, rationalization, avoidance or compensating with the positives (Hemesath, 2016) until the very end. It was taken as more of an opportunity to prove their worth, therefore, whatever they were receiving was good enough for them. It was seen that the participants found the partners, whom they thought they could change, and fill their personal void by renewing hope through pursued love (Pharaon, 2022b). As the participants felt a sense of discrepancy in the beginning, and perceived the fading affection once they felt committed, it was difficult for them to choose reality, over potential. They tried everything to get their partners to make themselves feel loved, and chosen. Their coping tactics included, emotional drama, consistent self-betrayal/abandonment, and false hope despite mistreatment. These findings were in consistent with the study that concluded that participants self-sabotaged in the relationships due to fear, to prevent hurt, lack of self-esteem, relationship pursuit, broken trust, and lack of relationship skills (Peel, & Caltabiano, 2021). Few common reasons were found for the emerged patterns among participants. One, the felt issues around received, and expected affection were overlooked to maintain the future fantasy with their partner (Peel & Caltabiano, 2021). Second, the participants did created scenarios to get the attention, and love they wanted across all stages of their relationship by over-extending oneself, and single-handedly maintaining the relationship by obtaining emotional intimacy in any way they could. This also gave us insight into their relationship script, and beliefs with which one enters the relationships. It was found in one of the studies that (Kemer et al., 2016) that married Turkish individuals who sensed a deeper connection with their spouses may give and expect a lot of attention and affection which often results in unmet expectations that cause relationship dissatisfaction. Third, participants responses analysis concluded that they had put their partners on a pedestal which also led to halo effect, and positive partner/ relationship attribution. Lastly, there was a constant longing for reciprocation even in the early stages which did lead to abandoning of self, focusing on pleasing their partners, or being hypervigilant to their actions (Zuckerman & Tsai, 2005). These reasons were enabled in the participants by their partner's pattern of giving them intermittent love, creating push, and pull dynamic. It was interesting to find that no participant could leave the relationship until their partners left them, even when limerence love ended. Also, in the beginning of the relationship, the limerence love pattern wasn't activated as some participants shared being cautious, not rushing, and taking time to commit due to bad past experiences, until the partners positive behaviours proved them to be the perfect soulmates. However, partners sudden withdrawal

of affection reinforced their core negative beliefs, which made them fall back to the familiarity which was securing affection at any cost.

Based on the current findings, it was seen that there was a lack of understanding, relational skills, and education about healthy relationships. According to Ellis and colleagues (1989), when people think about how their spouses should act and how their marriage should be, they become intolerant and impatient. Similarly, it is the case for dating relationships, as it was observed that what relationships are for, remains less known among participants. Therefore, the mental health professionals, teachers, and social workers can educate young adults regarding healthy love, and its elements. Therapists can encourage clients to take individual therapy, and couples to understand their way of showing up in relationships, choosing partners, and making them equipped with relational skills, and emotional intelligence.

Limitations, and Future Research

The article consists of certain limitations. First, it was challenging to work with couples due to unwillingness, lack of participation, and separation. Hence, data was collected from one of the couple members. Secondly, it was only possible to connect with individuals on social media platforms who were willing and emotionally prepared to invest their time and energy to share their stories.. Future researchers could conduct qualitative research on larger samples which can help in generalizing the results across various demographics over time. Future research should conduct in-depth studies on patterns of toxic relationships in association with different types, and elements of love, as an addition to study the difference in the generalised theory-based processes as per shift in the modern-relationship dynamics.

Declarations

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

Ethics approval was obtained for the full project from the University, and informed consent certificates were filled by the participants prior to the interviews..

Consent for Publication

Not applicable

Availability of Data and Materials

The dataset obtained and analyzed during this study is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Competing Interests

The author declares that no competing interests in this manuscript.

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Authors' Contributions

AB and SA carried out the proposal of the main idea of the research. AB contributed the collection of data, analysis and article writing. AB and SA contributed to revision of the article content. All authors have read and approved the final article.

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