

THE RELATION BETWEEN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, SEXUAL IDENTITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

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Abstract: *This research aims to capture the importance of developing people's emotional intelligence, regardless their sexual orientation. Mayer & Salovey (2016) argue that a person's ability to recognize emotions, understand their meaning and manage them appropriately contributes to their personal, professional, and social adaptation. The results show that emotional intelligence plays an essential role both in homosexuals' opening-up to others with regard to their sexual orientation and in the heterosexuals' attitude toward the minority sexual group.*

Key words: *emotional intelligence, sexual identity, sexual orientation, development of heterosexual, gay and lesbian identity.*

1. Introduction

Starting from the idea that the concepts of sexual orientation and sexual identity are given a minimum of attention in the Romanian contemporary society, and that the heterosexual sexual orientation is mostly tolerated and accepted by it, the present research aims to highlight a possible solution in the dispute on sexual orientation, namely, the development of emotional intelligence. Its supporters believe that emotional skills play an important role in almost every part of a person's life, from career success to being liked by the others. However, so far, it has not been studied in relation to sexual identity and sexual orientation.

Mayer & Salovey (1997) define emotional intelligence as the ability to perceive, assess and express emotions, to access and generate feelings when they facilitate thinking, to understand emotion and emotional information, and to adjust feelings for affective and intellectual development. Recently, Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey (2016) have described a set of principles that represent the way they see emotional intelligence. These principles are: (1) Emotional intelligence is a mental ability, (2) Emotional intelligence is best measured as an ability, (3) Intelligent problem solving does not correspond neatly to intelligent behaviour, (4) A test's content — the problem solving area involved—must be clearly specified as a precondition for the measurement of human mental abilities, (5) Valid tests have well-defined subject matter that draws out relevant human mental abilities, (6) Emotional intelligence is a broad intelligence and (7) Emotional intelligence

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is a member of the class of broad intelligences focused on hot information processing. Researchers have classified the variety of emotional intelligence models as follows: the abilities model which refers to emotional intelligence as a cognitive ability and the mixed models of emotional intelligence which address emotional intelligence as a blend between personality traits and cognitive skills (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 2008). Thus, the authors' perspective includes skills that engage people in processing emotional information about their own emotions but also the others' and the ability to use and guide this emotional information for cognitive and behavioural purposes. Their model is based on abilities that are different from the personality traits and consists of four branches: (1) *perceiving emotions* – the ability to identify emotions in oneself and others, as well as in objects, art, stories, music, and other stimuli; (2) *using emotions to facilitate thought* – the ability to generate, use, and feel emotion as necessary to communicate feelings, or use them in other cognitive processes; (3) *understanding emotions* – the ability to comprehend emotional information, how emotion combine and progress through relationship transitions, and to appreciate such emotional meanings; and (4) *managing emotions* – the ability to be open to feelings, to regulate them in oneself and others to promote personal understanding and growth (Salovey, Mayer, Caruso & Lopes, 2003). This model is based on the premise that emotions contain information about relationships between people, and when the relationship between two people changes, there is a change on the emotional level towards the other person (Mayer, Salovey, Caruso & Sitarenios, 2001). In summary, emotional intelligence refers to the person's ability to receive emotional information and to recognize the meaning of emotions in order to use them in solving problems and making abstract judgments (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

In terms of sexual identity and sexual orientation it is necessary to define these terms because they are found in the specialty literature as interchangeable. The differentiation of the two concepts starts from a person's sexual predisposition going towards recognition and identification with these genetic and biological predispositions, influenced by environmental or social factors. Sexual identity refers to how a person builds and defines their sexual Ego. This includes sexual orientation, role-play identity, along with their significance in a person's experiences and life history (American Psychological Association & National Association of School Psychologists, 2015). As far as sexual orientation is concerned, being one of the most debated topics at present, it refers to the sexual and romantic attraction one person feels towards another person. In Molnar's vision (2015), sexual orientation is regarded as a feature of human sexuality, including sexual attraction, desires and fantasies, along with feelings of love and tenderness expressed through a certain sexual behaviour. It involves three dimensions: (a) the sexual dimension which includes wishes, attraction, sexual fantasies, behaviour and practices; (b) the emotional dimension which refers to love, tenderness, affection, romantic attachment and a person's emotional needs; (c) the social dimension which includes interpersonal relationships, social preferences, sexual socialization and lifestyle. The most well-known categories of sexual orientation include attraction for people of the same gender (homosexual, lesbian), attraction for people of the opposite gender (heterosexual) and attraction for both sexes (bisexual). However, sexual orientation does not only refer to sexual and romantic attraction, it is a complex concept that includes a "constellation of emotional, cognitive and behavioural characteristics that constitute a person's self image, as a sexual and intimate being" (Bieschke, Perez, & DeBord, 2007, p. 28). In Money's opinion (1988), the feelings of love are very important in defining and conceptualizing

sexual orientation because these represent only one aspect of the uniqueness of a person's sexuality. Thus, the concept of sexual orientation may mean something different for each individual, depending on the uniqueness of his fantasies, desires, affective and erotic feelings, sexual activities and significant relationships. In the specialty literature, there are many perspectives and theoretical models illustrating the formation of sexual identity in homosexual sexual orientation, but too little research focuses on the development of sexual identity in the heterosexual sexual orientation because of the assumption that heterosexuality is considered normative. In Eliason's view (1995, p. 821) heterosexuals are "a monolithic, stable group with predictable attitudes about non-heterosexuals and consistent and clear feelings about the (hetero) sexual identity". As regarding the development of heterosexual identity, it refers to "the process by which heterosexual persons identify themselves and express many aspects of their own sexuality" (Worthington, Savoy, Dillon, & Vernaglia, 2002, p. 510). The American Psychological Association (APA) has argued and affirmed that homosexuality does not involve "any kind of degradation in reasoning, stability, reliability or social and professional capacity and urged all mental health specialists to take the lead in eliminating the stigma of mental illness associated with homosexuality" (as cited in Greene & Herek, 1994, p. 1). Thus, the development of gay/ lesbian identity assumes perspectives from the biological models (the existence of certain hormones, dysfunction of the reproductive capacity, etc.) and from the perspective of traditional psychodynamic models (lesbian identity is seen as a link between aetiology and genesis), Freud suggesting that homosexuality represents the failure to solve certain problems at the Oedipal stage. Homosexuality and bisexuality are seen as non-pathological variations of human behaviour and identification can cause a high level of stress for the homosexual, lesbian and bisexual people trying to achieve a positive self-esteem in a hostile society and within their families.

2. Method

2.1. Research Objectives and Hypotheses

The current study focuses on topics previously addressed through a quantitative investigation of the relationship between emotional intelligence, sexual identity and sexual orientation. The research hypotheses are:

- (1) There are differences between people with homosexual and heterosexual sexual orientation regarding emotional intelligence.
- (2) There are differences between Romanians and Danes regarding emotional intelligence.
- (3) We assume that there is an association between the heterosexuals' emotional intelligence and attitude towards toward lesbians and gay men.
- (4) We assume there is an association between emotional intelligence and openness as concerning sexual orientation in lesbians and gay men.
- (5) We assume there is an association between emotional intelligence and sexual identity in lesbians and gay men.

2.2. Participants and Procedure

There were involved 120 participants, 60 Romanian and 60 Danes, aged 25-35 ($M = 28, 12$). The 60 Romanian nationality participants and the 60 Danes nationality participants

were divided according to their sexual orientation, 30 heterosexual participants and 30 participants with homosexual sexual orientation.

2.3. Measure

Participants were invited to individually complete the following 5 psychological tests:

(1) *Emotional Intelligence Scale* - EIS aims at assessing emotional intelligence viewed from an aptitudinal perspective, based on the original model proposed by Salovey and Mayer, through a self-administered questionnaire. It consists of 33 items with an Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .90 and the retest test fidelity coefficient of .78 (Schutte et al., 1998). In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale is $\alpha = .93$, which indicates an excellent internal consistency.

(2) *Test for assessing the four skills of emotional intelligence* – TASEI has four parts: perceiving emotions – PE, using emotions to facilitate thought – UEFT, understanding emotions – UE and managing emotions – ME (Caruso & Salovey, 2012). Regarding the psychometric qualities of the test, the results of this research prove an excellent internal consistency for the total score ($\alpha = .95$). Given the test components, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient indicates a good internal consistency for each skill ($\alpha = .85$ – perceiving emotions, $\alpha = .85$ – using emotions to facilitate thought, $\alpha = .89$ – understanding emotions and $\alpha = .85$ – managing emotions).

(3) *The Revised Attitudes Towards Lesbian and Gay Men Scale* – ATLG-R measures the attitude towards gay and lesbian people and it consists of 10 items, out of which items 3, 5, 8, 10 are reversed. It is divided into two subscales: *Attitudes toward gay men subscale*, consisting of the first five items and *Attitudes toward lesbians subscale*, including the last five items (Herek, 1997). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale is $\alpha = .95$, which demonstrates an excellent internal consistency of the entire scale.

(4) *Outness Inventory* encompasses 11 items and assesses the extent to which gay, lesbian and bisexual people are open to their own sexual orientation. The answers indicate to what extent the person's sexual orientation is known and discussed with different types of people (mother, father, work colleagues, etc.). The inventory contains three sub-scales: *Out to Family*, for which the average of items 1, 2, 3 and 4 is calculated, *Out to World* is represented by the average of items 5, 6, 7 and 10 and *Out to Religion*, where the average of items 8 and 9 is calculated. In the exploratory factorial analysis used for the scale development, item 11 was found to correlate strongly both with *Out to Family* and *Out to World* subscales, and therefore it was not included in the subscale scoring. The total is calculated by the average of the three sub-scales, this being the score for *Overall Outness* (Mohr & Fassinger, 2000). As for the Cronbach's alpha coefficient in this study, it is $\alpha = .83$, the internal consistency of the whole inventory being a good one. The internal consistency of the subscales ranges from a high Cronbach's alpha (.82 for *Out to World* and *Out to Religion*) to an acceptable level ($\alpha = .69$ – *Out to Family*).

(5) *Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identity Scale* – LGBIS is used to measure sexual identity and contains 27 items, out of which items 11 and 23 are reversed. LGBIS includes eight subscales: *Acceptance Concerns*, *Concealment Motivation*, *Identity Uncertainty*, *Internalized Homonegativity*, *Difficult Process*, *Identity Superiority*, *Identity Affirmation* and *Identity Centrality* (Mohr & Kendra, 2011). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for each subscale indicates an internal consistency: (a) excellent for

Identity Uncertainty ($\alpha = .92$) and *Identity Affirmation* ($\alpha = .90$); (b) good for *Acceptance Concerns* ($\alpha = .86$), *Internalized Homonegativity* ($\alpha = .82$), *Difficult Process* ($\alpha = .85$), and *Identity Centrality* ($\alpha = .83$); and (c) acceptable for *Concealment Motivation* ($\alpha = .65$) and *Identity Superiority* ($\alpha = .62$).

3. Results and Discussion

To verify the first hypothesis, *there are differences between people with homosexual and heterosexual sexual orientation regarding emotional intelligence*, the results are shown in Table 1.

Various heterosexual and homosexual differences on emotional intelligence Table 1

Variable	Group	M	SD	t	df	p
EIS	heterosexual	124.02	20.57	1.64	118	.10
	homosexual	129.67	16.83			
TASEI	heterosexual	40.10	15.61	3.02	118	.003
	homosexual	47.43	10.40			
PE TASEI	heterosexual	10.42	3.73	3.28	118	.001
	homosexual	12.37	2.68			
UEFT TASEI	heterosexual	9.17	4.52	2.40	118	.018
	homosexual	10.90	3.26			
UE TASEI	heterosexual	9.23	4.27	3.78	118	.001
	homosexual	11.82	3.11			
ME TASEI	heterosexual	11.28	4.00	1.67	118	.09
	homosexual	12.35	2.87			

In terms of emotional intelligence (EIS) and managing emotions (ME TASEI), there are no statistically significant differences between people with heterosexual and homosexual sexual orientation. The results obtained reveal statistically significant differences between people with heterosexual and homosexual sexual orientation regarding: perceiving emotions, using emotions to facilitate thought, understanding emotions and the level of emotional intelligence development measured by TASEI. Thus, homosexuals identify their emotions accurately, have the ability to understand and analyse emotions, the way these change, but also to recognize the reason for those emotions, compared to heterosexual people.

The results obtained for the second hypothesis, *there are differences between Romanians and Danes regarding emotional intelligence*, are presented in Table 2.

There are no statistically significant differences between Romanian and Danes people in terms of perceiving emotions, using emotions to facilitate thinking, understanding emotions, managing emotions, and the level of emotional intelligence development measured by TASEI. Instead, the results indicate that there are statistically significant differences between Romanians and Danes regarding the level of emotional intelligence development measured by EIS. As a result, Danes are more capable than Romanians of receiving emotional information, decrypting the significance of emotions, and using them in solving problems.

Table 2
Differences between Romanians and Danes regarding emotional intelligence

Variable	Group	M	SD	t	df	p
EIS	Romanians	123.22	20.13	2.12	118	.03
	Danes	130.47	17.05			
TASEI	Romanians	42.05	11.45	1.37	118	.17
	Danes	45.48	15.56			
PE TASEI	Romanians	10.87	2.93	1.71	118	.08
	Danes	11.92	3.72			
UEFT TASEI	Romanians	9.65	3.60	1.04	118	.29
	Danes	10.42	4.40			
UE TASEI	Romanians	10.17	3.51	.99	118	.32
	Danes	10.88	4.32			
ME TASEI	Romanians	11.37	3.19	1.41	118	.16
	Danes	12.27	3.77			

In order to verify the third hypothesis, we assume that there is an association between the heterosexuals' emotional intelligence and attitude toward lesbians and gay men, we made a correlational analysis and the results are presented in Table 3.

Correlations between EI and attitudes toward lesbians and gay men Table 3

	EIS	TASEI	PE TASEI	UEFT TASEI	UE TASEI	ME TASEI
Attitudes toward lesbians and gay men ATLG-R	-.51***	-.48***	-.52***	-.36**	-.52***	-.41***

** p < .01, *** p < .001

Attitudes towards lesbians and gay men correlate negatively, statistically significant, both with the level of emotional intelligence development measured by EIS, and with that measured by TASEI. Also, attitudes toward lesbians and gay men correlate negatively with: perceiving emotions, using emotions to facilitate thought, understanding emotions, managing emotions. Thus, heterosexual people who identify and recognize their own emotions have the ability to use different feelings, emotional states, mood swings in assessing, solving and finding solutions to various problems, use their emotional knowledge, but they especially behave in an emotionally mature way, both on personal and social level, tend to achieve poor results in the degree of rejection of gay and lesbian individuals.

The Pearson coefficients show that there are significant relationships between emotional intelligence and openness regarding sexual orientation in lesbians and gay men (table 4).

Correlations between EI and openness toward lesbians and gay men Table 4

	EIS	TASEI	PE TASEI	UEFT TASEI	UE TASEI	ME TASEI
Overall Outness	.47***	.42***	.35**	.37**	.31*	.43***

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Correlations between EI and gay/ lesbian sexual identity

Table 5

	EIS	TASEI	PE TASEI	UEFT TASEI	UE TASEI	ME TASEI
Acceptance Concerns LGBIS	-.48***	-.51***	-.45***	-.36**	-.39**	-.61***
Concealment Motivation LGBIS	-.28	-.32*	-.30*	-.21	-.31*	-.30*
Identity Uncertainty LGBIS	-.59***	-.47***	-.38**	-.38**	-.29*	-.58***
Internalized Homonegativity LGBIS	-.45***	-.46***	-.32**	-.45***	-.34**	-.49***
Difficult Process LGBIS	-.39**	-.48***	-.38**	-.54***	-.28*	-.48***
Identity Superiority LGBIS	-.14	-.20	-.13	-.16	-.10	-.31*
Identity Affirmation LGBIS	.47***	.61***	.47***	.55***	.61***	.48***
Identity Centrality LGBIS	.25*	.30*	.37**	.15	.36**	.19

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Overall outness correlates with perceiving emotions, using emotions to facilitate thought, understanding emotions and managing emotions. Also, overall outness correlates with the level of emotional intelligence development measured both with EIS and TASEI. These results highlight the fact that lesbians and gay men are able to decode emotional information, use it to redirect attention to significant events, understand complex feelings and use emotions to make the most appropriate decision, tend to talk openly with others (mother, father, work colleagues, friends, extended family, etc.) about their sexual orientation.

To verify the last hypothesis, *we assume there is an association between emotional intelligence and sexual identity in lesbians and gay men*, the results presented in Table 5 were obtained.

The level of emotional intelligence development measured by TASEI and the one measured by EIS correlate statistically significant with both identity affirmation and identity centrality. While identity centrality is associated only with perceiving emotions and understanding emotions, identity affirmation associates with all four abilities of emotional intelligence: perceiving emotions, using emotions to facilitate thought, understanding emotions, managing emotions. Homosexual and lesbian people who identify and recognize their own emotions have the ability to use different emotions in finding solutions to various problems, use their emotional knowledge, but mostly act emotionally mature, tend to achieve high results in their own identity assertion. For lesbians and gay men who have a high level of emotional intelligence and are able to identify emotions and process them cognitively, their own identity becomes the central element of their global identity.

It can be noticed that there is a negative association between emotional intelligence, all four emotional abilities and: acceptance concerns, identity uncertainty, internalized homonegativity and difficult process. The level of emotional intelligence development measured by TASEI correlates negatively, statistically significant, only with concealment motivation. Managing emotions correlates negatively with both concealment motivation and identity superiority. Concealment motivation is associated negatively with perceiving

emotions and understanding emotions.

The results show that lesbians and gay men who are able to perceive, assess and express emotions, to understand emotion and emotional information, and to manage emotions for optimal affective and intellectual development tend to be less concerned about stigmatization of homosexual/ lesbian sexual orientation, no longer have an excessive need to protect their personal intimacy, they have a lower sexual orientation uncertainty, more readily accept their own sexual identity, and they overcome more easily the difficulty of the process of formation and development of the gay/ lesbian identity.

4. Conclusions

The interpretation of the results of this study can lead to the drawing of a series of conclusions. First of all, it can be said that there are differences between homosexuals in Romania and Denmark regarding the level of development of emotional intelligence, but there are no statistically significant differences between the heterosexuals belonging to the two nationalities. This result can be attributed to the socially desirable answers received from the group of heterosexual people in Romania (and not only), which leads to the necessity of deepening the studies on this topic.

Secondly, it can be said that emotional intelligence plays an important role both in the opening of people with homosexual sexual orientation toward others regarding their own sexual orientation and in the attitude of heterosexuals toward the minority sexual group. It can be argued that a heterosexual's well-defined sexual identity and assumed sexuality leads to the adoption of a favourable attitude towards gay/ lesbian individuals. Moraru (2010), in a research on the social perception of homosexuality in Romania, concluded that attitudes towards homosexuality are related to age, level of education, religious affiliation, and contact with homosexuals. Thus, religious affiliated people, who go regularly to church, have significant results in terms of intolerance toward homosexuals compared to those who do not regularly attend the religious institution. Also, people from a rural environment are more intolerant and a possible explanation would be related to the assimilation of traditional moral values. At the same time, the research participants who are in contact with gay/ lesbian individuals are more tolerant toward people from the minority sexual group compared to those who have never been in contact with them.

Last but not least, the results obtained support the fact that the level of development of emotional intelligence influences the formation of homosexual and lesbian sexual identity. Thus, people with a high level of emotional intelligence have a better defined sexual identity. The specialty literature mentions the idea that gay and lesbian people who are open to others regarding their own sexual orientation "incorporate public and private identity into a unitary image" (Molnar, 2015, p. 94). At the same time, Cass (1979) supports the importance of the socialization process in integrating gay / lesbian identity and describes identity acceptance in relation to self and others. The D'Augelli model (1994) stresses the importance of social experiences and exchanges in different contexts whereby the person integrates his / her sexual identity.

In conclusion, one can emphasize the importance of carrying out more research involving people with homosexual sexual orientation in Romania. Recent studies carried out by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2012) showed that Romania is on the last places, compared to Denmark (this being the first) as concerning the level of acceptance of sexual minorities, their discrimination and the level of openness of

homosexuals toward others regarding their own sexual orientation. The results of the research highlight the need for further research into the level of development of emotional intelligence in groups with different sexual orientations as well as the design and implementation of programmes focusing on developing the emotional intelligence of heterosexual and homosexual people. The objectives and topics of such a programme could be: to develop heterosexual and homosexual individuals' emotional abilities (perceiving emotions, using emotions to facilitate thought, understanding emotions and managing emotions), to assume one's own sexual identity (heterosexual and homosexual), and to identify the homosexuals' needs in relationship with heterosexual persons and vice versa. These are reinforced by Coleman's vision (1982) who supports, in the model of the five stages of the development of homosexual identity (pre-coming out, coming out, exploration, first relationships and integration), that it is essential that the person accepts his own gay / lesbian identity in order to be able to reveal their sexual orientation, which will be followed by the support and acceptance so necessary in the process of validating the newly formed sexual identity.

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