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Emotionally Intelligent People Choose More Supportive Partners

What is this research about?

Emotional Intelligence (EI) refers to the ability of people to perceive, understand, manage, and use their emotions to help them in their day-to-day life. Since the concept was first introduced in the early 1990s, researchers have found that people with high levels of EI – which is sometimes thought of as ‘empathy’ – tend to have more self-esteem than others and enjoy healthier, more supportive relationships. However, there has been a surprising lack of research on the connection between EI and depression. Some researchers have found that emotionally intelligent people may be more susceptible to depression than others. But some suggest that depressed people with high levels of EI can reduce the risk of becoming depressed by choosing a more supportive romantic partner.

What did the researchers do?

Researchers at York University and Ryerson University set out to determine if emotionally intelligent people who suffer from depression are more likely to choose supportive partners than people with low EI. They looked at 50 graduate students who had been diagnosed with a history of major depression and who were in a romantic

What you need to know:

Emotionally intelligent people – in other words, people with a greater ability to understand and use their emotions in their day-to-day life – tend to choose romantic partners who are supportive and not critical. The partners of people with high levels of EI are not overbearing in their support. People who tend to suffer from depression may not need as much direct support if they are higher on EI.

relationship. Both the students and their partners were interviewed. Unlike past researchers, who have tended to rely on the participants in their studies to identify themselves as emotionally intelligent, the York and Ryerson researchers used the relatively new Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT) to measure the EI of the students. However, because they only looked at 50 students, the study is somewhat limited. And the fact that they were graduate students means that the study’s results cannot be applied to the general population.

What did the researchers find?

The researchers found that people who are better at recognizing how they feel – and who are

better at using their feelings to guide their actions – tend to have a more supportive, less critical romantic partner. The partners of emotionally intelligent people see themselves as supportive, as well. However, they also describe themselves as less ‘active’ in giving support to their significant others. Emotionally intelligent people, it seems, choose partners who are supportive but not too overbearing. Interestingly, though, these same people, with higher levels of EI, view their partners as being more supportive than they may actually be. This suggests that the ‘illusion’ of support is as important as the support itself. In other words, it is important for people to ‘feel’ like they are receiving help from a partner.

How can you use this research?

This research enriches our knowledge of the relationship between EI and depression. It could also help people suffering from depression to choose better romantic partners. Researchers need to continue to investigate the motivations underlying a person’s decision to choose a romantic partner.

About the Researchers

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