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THE IMPACT OF IMAGO THERAPY ON COUPLES' INTIMACY, BURNOUT AND LOVE STYLES

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Resumen: El objetivo principal de nuestro estudio fue determinar el impacto de la terapia Imago sobre la intimidad, el agotamiento y los estilos de amor en parejas. La población de estudio consistió en 40 parejas que fueron visitadas en 2016. Para los fines de este experimento, las parejas fueron seleccionadas por el método de muestreo aleatorio por grupos y divididas en dos grupos iguales; Experimental y de control. El grupo experimental fue entrenado semanalmente durante 8 sesiones, 1,5 horas por sesión, y el grupo de control no recibió ningún entrenamiento. Con base en los hallazgos de la investigación, el programa de entrenamiento de la terapia de Imago mostró un efecto significativo en el mantenimiento de una familia sana y el desarrollo de una relación cálida y amistosa entre las parejas.

Palabras clave: Terapia de Imago, intimidad, burnout, estilos de amor

Abstrac: The main purpose of our study was to determine the impact of Imago therapy on intimacy, burnout, and love styles in couples. The study population consisted of 40 couples who have been visited in 2016. For the purpose of this experiment, couples were selected by random cluster sampling method and divided into two equal groups; experimental and control. The experimental group were trained weekly for 8 sessions, 1.5 hours per session, and the control group were not given any training. Based on research findings, the Imago therapy training program showed a significant effect on maintaining a healthy family and developing a warm and friendly relations between couples.

Keywords: Imago therapy, intimacy, burnout, love styles

1. INTRODUCTION

Marriage is the best social practice which provides a sophisticated and elegant life-long relationship with love and affection. It meets the emotional and psychological needs and increases happiness and contentment (Brown & Reinhold, 1999). The two most important factors which determine the relationship dynamics between couples are love and its quality (Gonzaga, Keltner, Londahl, & Smith, 2001). Love and love styles are important factors which impact the quality of the marital relationship (Levine, Aune, & Park, 2006). Love for the spouse is the cornerstone of marital satisfaction which itself is an indicator of a person's marital status or romantic relationship (Edalati & Redzuan, 2010). One of the most important theories that explain different types of love is six-dimensional theory of "Lee". According to studies from different countries such as the United States, Canada, and Great Britain six ways have been introduced as ways to express love (Neto, 2001): 1- Romantic love (Eros): this love, is described as a passionate physical and emotional desire to satisfy sexual needs and create security and aesthetic enjoyment for each other. 2- Friendly love (Storge): a pleasant intimacy which slowly grows and spreads to both sides; in this process, partners gradually reveal their different aspects of existence for each other. 3- Game playing love (Ludus): in this way, love is seen as a fun with no obligation on it, a situation that is like taking part in a game and is usually short-lived and will soon end up. 4- Possessive (Mania): it is a severe emotional state with envy and love along with obsession that makes a person nervous and afraid of rejection. 5- Realistic love (Pragma): logical love which is based on a proper partner selection considering the individual needs and consistent with age, religion, and character. In this case, satisfaction exists more than stimulation and excitement. 6- Selfless love (Agape): unconditional love, with a care of the beloved that is combined with the flexibility and generosity as well. There is self-sacrificing in this kind of love (Collins, Cramer, & Singleton-Jackson, 2005; Kunkel & Burleson, 2003). "Agape" represents all-giving love, which expresses love and care for others with no expectation of future reward or reciprocity, as well as a dedication and devotion to partner's love and meeting their needs. Agape or "compassionate love" is a distinct type of love and characterized by openness, compassion, caring, concern for the welfare of beloved partnership and understanding their needs, and willingness to participate and support their partner (Regan, 2016). Prosperity and health of

the family, depend on an intimate, healthy and productive relationship between couples. Nowadays family therapists believe that marital intimacy is the most important aspect of family structure which results in emotional and psychological satisfaction. In other words intimacy plays the role of a mediator of the relationship between emotional skillfulness and marital satisfaction. In cases of intimacy, couples feel a sense of mutual closeness, warmth, interdependence and secure in their relationship (Cordova, Gee, & Warren, 2005). True marital intimacy is valuable because it affects the commitment and stability of a relationship. This is positively associated with marital satisfaction and adjustment and is one of the key factors in the quality of life (Harper, Schaalje, & Sandberg, 2000; Waring, 1988). If couples are able to show their tender feelings to each other, especially love and affection, they experience intimacy more than before (Rice, 2001). A marriage without intimacy is not a fulfilling relationship and it represents the most common problem of family issues (Halford, 2001). Lack of intimacy and love have been indicated as a major cause of frustrations in marriage (Schnose, 2005). Increase in reported divorces and marital dissatisfaction are two main reasons that necessitate couple intervention and specialized training for marital relationship improvement. Couple training enhances the quality of a relationship using the latest scientific findings. It has been applied in order to prevent divorce and marital problems. A better understanding of important aspects of marriage such as intimacy, can lead to marital relationship improvement and couple therapy which can affect family and social functioning (Greeff & Malherbe, 2001). Hence, intimacy is conceptualized as an important behavioral pattern that is based on the acceptance, satisfaction, and love (TenHouten, 2007).

Marital burnout is one of basic causes of marital disorders and lack of intimacy. Couples in romantic relationship should understand burnout as a common reaction to stressful situations; if they do, they will let go of useless effort to change each other and instead they will try to change the setting. Marital burnout occurs due to a set of unrealistic expectations and fluctuations in life. The burnout of love is a gradual process and it rarely occurs by sudden. In fact, intimacy and love gradually fade and result in a feeling of general fatigue. The most severe burnout is relationship collapse. Burnout by definition is a setting of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion that arises from a chronic mismatch between expectations and reality (Pines, 1996). Daily Positive behaviors provide

the appropriate opportunities for couples to show more of their intimacy to each other (Kline & Stafford, 2004). Couples who passed relationship enhancement training were held higher levels of positive communication compared to couples with no training (Marchand & Hock, 2000). Many marital problems were caused by misunderstanding and ineffective communication (Sprecher & Metts, 1999). Enrich intimacy and empathy are the most important goals relationship enhancement program. Relationship skills training were useful to reduce the risk of marital turmoil and to prevent the development of problems in the future (Markman & Halford, 2005). One of the most important ways to form a cohesive family is to get education (Hendrix & Hunt, 2013). The educational content is also important. If techniques are designed according to the level of knowledge, transmission of information would be facilitated. In addition, studies have shown that there is a positive and lasting impact on how couples perceive the quality of their relationship (Miller, 1971; Nunnally, 1971).

Family therapists often recognize lack of intimacy and problem solving skills as culprits of severe family problems (Peterson & Green, 2009). Investigative case studies of psychotherapy clinics and counseling centers have shown that the root of many client's concerns is related to love, emotional issues and marital burnout. Therefore, it is essential to do extensive research in this regard. Main cause of marital conflict and family burnout is a subconscious mind image, which is imprinted in the couple's mind. Releasing the couples from the shackles and the limitations of subconscious mind are the objectives that help spouses to improve their relationship (Gladding, 2015). Therefore, this matter shows the practical importance of this method which is creating intimate and romantic relationships between couples. Imago therapy is one of the most exciting and interesting educational practices that can attract families and can be effective for the strength of families' foundation. Imago therapy in marital relations is a tool to achieve a conscious relationship that facilitates conscious healing of childhood wounds in couples. According to a theoretical principle, it is believed that we select our mates based on the subconscious image of a person that can complete us and it is called Imago or childhood ideal (Kleven, 2012). In fact, Imago is the unconscious idealized mental image of someone, especially a parent, which formed in childhood and persisting unconsciously into adulthood and influences a person's behavior. Imago therapy is a process in which knowledge

and information are given to couples and most importantly they can be trained; so they know the subconscious aspects of their relationship and examine the roots of their conflicts, rather than trying to solve it to the surface (Lipthrott, 2016). After changing the marriage and turning subconscious relationships into the conscious relationship, spouses can gain their required love and intimacy (Hendrix, 2007) and take a step towards reducing their burnout. In this study, Imago therapy has been practiced to help people. The ideal relationship accompanies by satisfaction and love and marital burnout are being prevented throughout the marriage. These are the most important aspects of marital issues and there has been little research in this area. The goal of this study was to select a particular treatment that can help couples improve their relationships and make their living experience intimate. In the present study, we attempt to answer whether or not Imago therapy effective on intimacy, burnout and love styles in couples.

1.1. Review of related Literature

Martin and Bielawski (2011) performed a study entitled "What is the African American's experience following Imago education?" 6 women and 6 men were interviewed and they found that Imago therapy training, improved the relationship between couples and it improved their understanding of themselves, their partners and their childhood. (Martin & Bielawski, 2011). In another study by Soltani, Mollazadeh, Mahmoodi and Hosseini (2013), they found that an emotionally focused couple therapist was effective on the intimacy of the relationship (Soltani, Molazadeh, Mahmoodi, & Hosseini, 2013). In another study (2015) Abdolvand, Sedrposhan, and Dayarian concluded that Imago therapy has a significant effect on marital satisfaction (Abdolvand, Sedrposhan, & Dayarian, 2015). Hendrix, Hunt, Luquet, and Carlson (2015), used Imago therapy dialogue to deepen the couple therapy and achieved the positive results (Hendrix, Hunt, Luquet, & Carlson, 2015). Ghavi, Jamale, Mosallanejad and Mosallanejad (2015), in their research studied the marital burnout in infertile couples and found that infertile women experienced higher levels of marital burnout than their husbands ($P < 0.001$). A review of couples experiencing burnout measured different factors including psychological exhaustion ($P < 0.01$), physical exhaustion ($P < 0.01$) and emotional exhaustion ($P < 0.001$) and it showed that women are at greater risk of exhaustion. As a result, infertile couples' emotional, psychological and physical problems should be viewed as part of infertility treatment

and must be included in the medical and psychological care plans (Ghavi, Jamale, Mosalanejad, & Mosallanezhad, 2016). Muro, Holliman, and Luquet (2016), in their study entitled Imago therapy and accurate empathy development, found that suitable empathy improves their couple's relationship who have received this intervention (Muro, Holliman, & Luquet, 2016). Schmidt, Luquet, and Gehlert (2016), found that holding "Getting the love you want" (GTLYW) couples workshops affected the relationship satisfaction and communication patterns (Schmidt, Luquet, & Gehlert, 2016). Holliman, Muro, and Luquet (2016) investigated common factors between the couples therapists and Imago therapists who practice different theoretical approaches. It included a survey of shared beliefs, values and intervention strategies (Holliman, Muro, & Luquet, 2016). Regan (2016) in a study examined demographic correlations (age, gender, and race) on the Agapic love style (Regan, 2016).

2. METHOD

2.1. Participants and procedure

The goal of the current study was to evaluate the impact of Imago therapy on intimacy, burnout and love styles in couples residing in Tehran in 2016. The research was conducted by two groups of control and experimental along with pre-test and post-test.

Couples who tended to attend the workshops with this subject were invited. Among these couples, 40 couples were randomly selected. The inclusion criteria were as following: participants' age between 25-40, duration of marriage 3 to 10 years, having a high school diploma as the minimum educational level and a maximum of two children. They were randomly divided into two experimental and control groups (20 couples in each group). Then the pre-test with marital intimacy questionnaire, couple burnout measure, Lee's love styles questionnaire, were conducted on applicants and the experimental group was given Imago therapy techniques for 8 sessions once a week and each time lasted for one and a half hours, but the control group was not given any training. After completing training, post-test questionnaires were administered to both groups. In order to have homogeneous groups, two couples were removed from the control group, because reduced three couples from the experimental group and a couple from the control group through attrition. Therefore the final questionnaires were filled by 17 couples in

the experimental group and 17 couples in control group.

2.2. Measurement Instruments

2.2.1. Marital Intimacy Questionnaire (MIQ)

The questionnaire has been made by Stephen Van den Broucke, Vandereycken, and Vertoccen (1995) (Van den Broucke, Vandereycken, & Vertommen, 1995). This questionnaire consisted of 56 questions, each has 5 options that investigate 5 factors of intimacy problems, consensus, openness, affection, and commitment. It also has an index score of intimacy in general. In order to assess the reliability, this test was done in the United states on 240 couples in four social clubs and four sports clubs and its' psychometric evidence was approved. Its reliability by Van den Broucke et al. (1995) according to Cronbach's alpha for the five options as follows: intimacy problems 0.86, consensus 0.86, openness 0.83, affection 0.82 and commitment 0.72. And also to assess the construct validity of the questionnaire, its relationship with other tools that measures an aspect of marital performance, was examined by Van den Broucke et al. including an overall rating of 10 points out of marital intimacy that by definition to be determined by each of the participants. A scale of 9 questions to measure intimacy of the relationship and the German version of the Maudsley Marital Questionnaire (MMQ) which consists of three factors of marital, sexual, and general life. The highest positive correlation relationship were between scale intimacy of relationship with openness ($r = .47$) and affection ($r = .46$) and intimacy ($r = .45$). So Questionnaire (MIQ), measures what the questionnaire related to marital intimacy measures and we can say that is an acceptable validity.

2.2.2. Couple Burnout Measure (CBM)

Couple burnout measure is a self-report instrument to measure the degree of marital burnout among couples. This scale was invented by Pines (1996) (Pines & Nunes, 2003). It consists of 21 questions that include three main components of physical exhaustion (tiredness, lethargy, and sleep disorders), emotionally exhaustion (feelings of depression, hopeless, helpless) and mental exhaustion (feelings of worthlessness, frustration, and anger on the Spouse). All of these are answered on a seven-point scale (Pines, 1996). Evaluation of the reliability couple burnout measure showed that there is the internal consistency between

variables in a domain of 0.84 and 0.90. The validity approved by negative correlation with positive communication features such as a positive opinion about the relationship, dialogue quality, a sense of security, self-actualization, and sense of purpose, emotional attraction toward their spouse and the quality of their sex. Translated versions of CBM have successfully been used in intercultural studies in Norway, Hungary, Mexico, Spain, Portugal, Finland and Israel (Pines & Nunes, 2003). Reliability test - retest 0.89 for a period of one month, for a period of two months 0.76, and 0.66 for the four-month period have been reported. Internal continuing for most of the subjects was measured with a constant alpha factor that was between 0.91 and 0.93 respectively (Pines, 1996).

2.2.3. *Lee's Love Styles questionnaire*

This questionnaire by Hendrick and Hendrick uses the Theory of Lee's love styles and was built in 1986. Confirming factor analysis has shown that the structure of presented "Lee" has the ability to be used in multiple cultures (Neto et al., 2000). At the beginning, the present questionnaire had 42 questions. But the second confirmatory factor analysis of the items led to a reduction in a number of items to 24. Love styles scale is Likert-type and has 4 options and can show six dimensions of love. A person acquires in each subscale a score, which indicates the attitude towards it. The high score indicates the above tendency and low score indicates a slight tendency to it (Neto et al., 2000). Selected sentences in this short form by Hendrick and Hendrick and, and Dicke (1998) (every 4 items for a sub-scale) were introduced (Hendrick, Hendrick, & Dicke, 1998). Proportionality of this model was well. Alpha values varied from 0.65 for Ludus and 0.77 for Storge. According to the results, especially those that are associated with alpha coefficients are more appropriate in the short form 24-items related to attitudes of love; this form is preferred for studies of cross-cultural differences and diversity. Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted for different countries in Europe, South America, Africa and Asia.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Preliminary analysis

The mean age of participants were 33.6 and about %55 of participants had an educational level higher than a bachelor degree. Duration of marriage were between 3-5 years for %32 of the subjects, 5-7 years for %29, and 7-10 years for

%38. About %68 of the subjects had one or no child.

3.2. Research hypothesis and statistical analysis

Imago therapy techniques training is effective on intimacy, burnout and love styles among couples. To assess the research hypothesis, multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA¹) was used. Means and standard deviations for all variables are presented in Table 1 together with results MANCOVA.

Results of the multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) indicated the amount of F impact of independent variable on marital intimacy (F=33.682, P=0.001), burnout (F=6.271, P=0.015) and Agape love styles (F=6.747, P=0.012) which were significant. And also the amount of F of independent variable on Eros (F=1.451, P=0.233), Ludus (F=0.380, P=0.540), Storge (F=0.498, P=0.483), Pragma (F=0.002, P=0.962) and Mania (F=2.812, P=0.099) which was not significant. Thus after examining the influence of pre-test, there are significant differences among the average scores of marital intimacy, burnout, and style of Agape love in a post-test experimental and control groups. Therefore the null hypothesis of the mean difference between groups that was not significant in post-test after adjustment for potential pre-test effect is rejected and the hypothesis is accepted.

4. DISCUSSION

Investigating the research hypothesis, the findings showed that the Imago therapy techniques affected the intimacy, burnout, and Agape love style in couples. Considering the significance of Imago therapy training effected on intimacy, burnout, and styles of Agape love style and having no effect on Eros, Storge, Ludus, Mania and Pragma love styles, hence the research hypothesis is confirmed.

The main hypothesis of Imago therapy tells us the relationship is our essence and nature. We are born in relationship, we are wounded in relationship, and we can be healed in relationship (Hendrix, 2007). People choose a life partner who gives meaning to their lives and also satisfies their unmet childhood needs. After marriage, their spouses are not able to meet all their needs, (because the spouses themselves

¹ Assumptions such as normality analysis of covariance was used for data analysis.

have wounds from their childhoods), that's why they feel depressed, frustrated, and marital burnout. Furthermore, specific behaviors happen for men and women during the marriage that makes couple alienates from each other. Excessive discussions, debates, criticisms, and emotional rejection are some of these behaviors. Since most couples do not know the underlying motive of these behaviors, it leads to couple's alienation and loss of intimacy between them. In these cases, the marital intimacy and the mutual understanding for marital adjustment are reduced, the negative and destructive effects on family mental health and children's mental health are created. In this view, the goal of therapy is facilitating communication between couples. It will help couples to have a healthy relationship and more empathy to understand each other. Imago therapy leads couples for having a conscious relationship. This approach emphasizes that childhood relationships are an important factor which creates couples' unrealistic expectations from each other and it could lead to marital burnout. Imago therapy offers some techniques for communicating properly. It also seems that the impact of these practices on Agape love style is because of Imago therapy emphasis on self-sacrificing and unconditional love with the care of the beloved, flexibility and generosity.

Imago Relationship Therapy helps couples to create a safe space to find empathy and validation through mirroring and deep listening. The Imago intentional dialogue is the main technique used in this therapy. In an intentional dialogue, one person speaks about what is on his or her mind and the other listens. The listener, mirrors back, meaning restates what the other said, without adding comments or opinions. The use of intentional couple's dialogue restores contact and connection, thus achieving mutual emotional healing. According to Imago therapy training such as determining caring behaviors list that couples become familiar with each other's' superficial and deep aspirations and needs and this makes them gain a new knowledge and insight, hence change their behavior by meeting these needs. This approach creates a safe environment filled with security and trust and teaches couples how to communicate, which in turn brings the unconscious marital issues to the conscious level and help them confront, accept and resolve the conflicts.

This process results in a high-quality marriage showed with security, satisfaction, happiness and sexual and emotional intimacy; a marriage

with loss of conflicts and minimum chance for divorce.

In this approach, the partners through a process of intentional dialogue and practice of anger management can share both positive emotions and negative emotions in the safe space with each other. In this case, each of the couples acquires more aware of himself, his/her Spouse and in general of their marriage. Hendrix called it a conscious marriage (Hendrix, 2007). Couples who have a constructive relationship; in other words, understand each other, after discussion become intimate with each other, easily talk about their problems and conflicts and look for their problem-solving and conflict resolution and do not use irrational reactions such as avoidance and aggression and report higher marital quality (Hendrix, 2007). A conscious marriage is full of security, satisfaction, vitality and has an emotional and sexual intimacy in the relationship and high quality and lack of conflict and least likely to separation. Doing some Imago therapy exercises such as renewing romantic memories of the past, giving unexpected gifts and doing common recreational activities lead to increased positive feeling and emotional closeness and decrease negative feelings such as anger which has led to increased intimacy and ultimately to reduce the frequency conflict among the couples. Therefore, learning and using these techniques increases intimacy and Agape love styles and reduce couples burnout.

Table1: Result of multivariate analysis of covariance

Index	Mean		S.D.		F	Sig.	Chi Eta
	Control	Experiment	Control	Experiment			
Intimacy	2.08	3.47	0.097	0.153	33.682	1	0.367
	2.09	4.02	0.126	0.157			
Burnout	3.94	3.96	0.204	0.254	6.271	0.015	0.098
	4	2.85	0.343	0.281			
Romantic love style (Eros)	2.5	2.36	0.467	0.389	1.451	0.233	0.024
	2.47	2.8	0.56	0.469			
Game playing love style (Ludus)	2.45	2.52	0.46	0.361	0.38	0.54	0.007
	2.38	2.55	0.579	0.378			
Friendly love style (Storge)	2.55	2.35	0.416	0.417	0.498	0.483	0.009
	2.47	2.33	0.544	0.598			
Realistic love style (pragma)	2.42	2.57	0.379	0.463	0.002	0.962	0
	2.37	2.44	0.478	0.439			
Possessive love style (Mania)	2.62	2.5	0.387	0.411	2.812	0.099	0.046
	2.53	2.47	0.45	0.549			
Selfless love style (Agape)	2.46	2.45	0.45	0.459	6.747	0.012	0.104
	2.36	3	0.518	0.583			

4.1. Limitations and suggestions

following cases can be noted: 1. Due to time limits on research, the participants were not followed up to determine how far the training has had an impact on solving their problems. 2. Since many couples have acute problems, they are strongly self-censor and are less willing that others will understand their problems; thus, it is possible that the problems haven't been stated as severe as they are.

In order to assess the long-term effects of this therapy and its impact on problem solving skills, we suggest to follow up the subjects after three months of completion of the training course. Longitudinal studies are required to evaluate this approach.

Regarding the potential implication of this approach in premarital counseling, it is highly recommended to study the effectiveness of this educational course on post-marriage life.

According to the results of this research on the effects of Imago relationship training on improving the intimacy, burnout, and love styles among couples, it is recommended that clinics, counseling centers, municipal health centers and all sectors related to family education training use the framework of training sessions related to this study.

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