



Articles

Psychosocial Determinants of Romantic Inclination Among Indian Youth

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Abstract

The present study was conducted with the aim of understanding the psychosocial determinants of romantic inclination among youth in India. We involved 779 student participants from a large central university in south India in the age range of 18-24 years. The participants filled measures on romantic inclination, personality, attachment style, interpersonal attraction, and social influence on romantic relationship in addition to a questionnaire on demographic information and relationship history. Analysis of the data revealed that males showed higher level of romantic inclination than females. Those who had current/past involvement in a romantic relationship (Lovers) showed higher levels of romantic inclination than those who had never involved in a romantic relationship (Non-lovers). Parents' type of marriage (Love/arranged), close friends' involvement in romantic relationship too had a discriminatory role in romantic inclination. Romantic inclination was significantly related to personality factors, attachment style, media and peer influences on romantic relationships and interpersonal attraction. Extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, media influence, peer influence, secure attachment and physical attraction emerged as significant predictors of romantic inclination in a regression model. Structural Equations Modeling (SEM) indicated that personality, attachment style and interpersonal attraction had a significant influence on romantic inclination mediated by both media and peer influences. Romantic inclination in turn significantly predicted romantic relationship status.

Keywords: romantic relationship, romantic inclination, social influence on romantic relationship, structural equations modelling

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Engaging in premarital romantic relationship is often considered as an exciting experience by many youths. They spend considerable time and energy in developing and maintaining such relationship though there is no guarantee that such relationship would give them the elated experience they crave for. Empirical studies have found associations between romantic experiences of youth with certain developmental advantages such as developing healthy personal identity, maintaining harmonious relations with family and peer group, developing healthy views on sexuality, consolidating career choices (Furman & Collins, 2008; Furman & Shaffer, 2003) and developing self-esteem and social competence (Zimmer-Gembeck, Siebenbruner, & Collins 2001, 2004). While romantic relationship in youth contributes to some developmental advantages, studies have also shown that such relationships go awry. For example poor quality romantic relationships are associated with alcohol and drug use, decreased academic performance, pathological symptoms such as externalizing and internalizing symptoms, rejection sensitivity in relationships, poor emotional health, and low job competence (Collins, Welsh, & Furman 2009; Harper, Dickson, & Welsh, 2006; Zimmer-Gembeck, Siebenbruner, & Collins 2001, 2004).

Studies conducted in the Western cultures have indicated that development of romantic relationship among youth is a multi-factorial developmental phenomenon that is influenced by factors such as age, gender, attachment styles, changes within the relationship, and on the social and cultural contexts in which they occur (Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009; Furman & Collins, 2008). Given that romantic love need to be understood within the cultural context, as argued by Dion and Dion (1996), existing cross-cultural studies on romantic relationships indicate that there may be cultural differences in romantic belief across cultures. Hatfield and Rapson (1996) succinctly point out that “social science research, including that into love and sex, has generally been conducted by Western scientists, from a Western perspective, with Western subjects as though this perspective were universal”. One issue with generalizing Western studies on romantic relationship with Eastern context is the role and functions of romantic relationship in marriage. While individualistic cultures assign greater importance to romantic relationships as a prologue to marriage, (Simpson, Campbell, & Berscheid, 1986) the collectivistic cultures on the other hand attach least importance to romantic relationship before marriage (Levine, Sato, Hashimoto, & Verma, 1995). In India, a society largely understood to be traditionalistic, premarital romantic relationships among youth are widely discouraged (Abraham & Kumar, 1999). Marriages approved and arranged by parents are the socially acceptable norm and premarital romantic relationship with or without marital ideation is strongly resisted and opposed by parents and elders in the family (Desai, McCormick, & Gaeddert, 1990). Many times, premarital love is considered as an act of bringing dishonor and might lead to storm in the family and hasten the marriage to a person not of one’s choice (Alexander, Garda, Kanade, Jejeebhoy, & Ganatra, 2006). Caste and community also play a vital role in Indian marriages in lieu of partner compatibility and preference (Corwin, 1977; Mullatti, 1995).

The widespread perception that, Indian youth do not find opportunities to mix and engage in romantic relationship is found to be a myth as evidenced by the results of the recent researches in Indian context indicating liberalized attitudes toward premarital romance and sex (Abraham & Kumar, 1999; International Institute for Population Sciences [IIPS], 2010). The findings of these studies not only demystify these traditionalistic notions but also challenge the conservative estimates of prevalence of such relationship. The social changes of the last generation fostered by globalization and the technological transformations in communication systems have significantly changed the young minds of the country and augmented the exposure to western culture, which promotes liberal attitude in gender mix and premarital relationship. At the same time, they face traditional age and sex stratified norms that espouse gender double standards and discourage the formation of romantic partnerships or even friendships among the unmarried and the selection of their own spouse (Alexander et al., 2006).

Need for the Study

Ample focus on research on premarital romantic relationship has not been provided in certain societies as evidenced by very limited research published on this issue among youth in non-western population and particularly developing nations (Desai, McCormick, & Gaeddert, 1990). This creates a knowledge gap in understanding the phenomenon from a cultural perspective. On the other hand, a few studies that explored romantic relationship among youth in India had a limited focus of examining such relationships in terms of premarital sex and pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. The role of interpersonal aspects and the psychological concomitants and determinants fostering such relationship were not the focus of those studies. This lead to a lack of clear psychosocial model and conceptualization of premarital romantic relationship in India. Hence, it is felt that there is a research gap in Indian context in the understanding of romantic relationship

from a psychosocial perspective and exploring the role of multitude of relationship variables on such relationships.

Rationale for the Variables in the Study

To arrive at the key factors that might influence romantic relationship, they were identified at three levels viz. individual, interpersonal, and social level factors. Among the various individual level factors, personality has been studied by relationship researchers as a salient correlating factor with different aspects of romantic relationship (Daley, Burge, & Hammen, 2000; Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2002; White, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 2004). Since personality refers to the unique and stable set characteristics of an individual, it might play a concrete role in interpersonal facets of one's life.

Intimate relationship involves attachment with others and it lays the foundation for further relationships. Attachment style is viewed as a specific way of relating oneself with others in close relationship and has been shaped by the childhood attachment experienced with the primary caregiver (Bowlby, 1973). Since romantic relationship involves components of attachment and pair bonding, the role of attachment style as an interpersonal factor might be a reasonable assumption. Another factor at interpersonal level is the interpersonal attraction with the desired partner. It reflects the feeling of passion, attraction and liking for a partner (McCroskey & McCain, 1974). Romantic relationship being a form of relationship with heightened level of passion, intimacy, and attraction, it is essential to explore the different aspects of interpersonal attraction in determining the development of romantic relationship.

Among the social factors, media and peer network find a predominant place in fostering romantic relationship (e.g. Eggermont, 2004; Connolly, Furman, & Konarski, 2000; Shapiro & Kroeger, 1991). The powerful role of social and entertainment media and their relative influence on the behavior of youth in the era of globalization is a matter of concern for parents, teachers and policy makers. The advent of internet based social networking has given the much expected autonomy and anonymity to youth to interact with their peer group as well as with opposite gender (Billedo, 2009; Pauley & Emmers-Sommer, 2007). The online and offline same sex and heterosexual relationship dominate the habits, attitudes and life style of youth taking away the parental control on the lifestyle of the youth (Alexander et al., 2006). Thus, the impact of media and peer influence on romantic relationship as social factors assumes importance.

In the light of the above assumptions, we felt that personality, attachment style, interpersonal attraction, media and peer influence might be considered as predictors of romantic relationship. We used two variables namely romantic inclination and relationship status (lovers vs non-lovers) to assess romantic relationship. Given the need for studying romantic relationship in Indian culture the main objective of the study was to examine the psychosocial determinants of romantic inclination among youth in view of the selected predictors. We expected that, in a hybrid Structural Equation Model, the selected study variables (personality, attachment style and interpersonal attraction) will predict romantic inclination mediated by social influence (media and peer influence). Additionally, we intended to examine romantic inclination with regard to gender, parent's type of marriage, type of residence (hosteller vs day scholar) relationship status of self and close friends. We hypothesized that romantic inclination would be higher for men and hostellers. We expected that participants whose parent had a love marriage and those whose friends are in a current romantic relationship, would show

higher level of inclination. Furthermore, we expected that ‘lovers’ would be more romantically inclined than ‘non-lovers’ will.

Method

Participants

The study was conducted in a large Central (federal) University in south India, which has enrolled about 6000 students. Students represent all the states and regions in India although south Indian students are slightly more in number. As students are from different states in India, they are exposed to multiple sub-cultural environment prevailing in Indian sub-continent in terms of languages, food habits, clothing, and life styles. Being a coeducational institution there is ample scope for gender mix and interaction. For the purpose of data collection, the university was divided into four major schools of study namely (i)science, (ii)social science and humanities, (iii)management and commerce, and (iv)engineering and technology. From each school, two departments were randomly selected and we included all the willing students from both first year and second year of study from those department. Among the 900 students who were approached for participation, 97 students expressed reservation for participation in the study and they were excluded from data collection. Among 803 students who participated in the study, responses of 779 students were found to be valid and were included finally. The socio-demographic characteristics of the selected sample are presented in [Table 1](#).

Table 1

Socio-Demographic Profile of Participants

Variable	Category	Participants	Percentage
Gender	Male	404	51.9
	Female	375	48.1
Discipline	Science	192	24.6
	Social science & Humanities	202	25.9
	Management & Commerce	212	27.2
	Engineering & Technology	173	22.2
Native state	South	285	36.6
	East	181	23.2
	West	160	20.5
	North	153	19.6
Family Type	Joint Family	256	32.9
	Nuclear	523	67.1
Parent's marriage	Love Marriage	300	38.5
	Arranged Marriage	479	61.5
Residence	Hosteller	339	43.5
	Non-Hosteller	440	56.5

Procedure

Permissions for data collection were obtained from the heads of the departments. Data collection was done during the beginning of the semester to include both freshers and those who had already spent at least a year in the university environment, thereby balancing the environmental influence on the sample. One session of 1-hour duration was set aside for data collection. The first author approached the students in their classroom, informed them about the purpose of the study and solicited their cooperation. Unwilling participants were allowed to stay out of the class room. Willing participants were provided with the consent form containing important information about the study, contact details of the researcher and specific instruction on the survey procedure. Participants were allowed to clear any doubts regarding their participation in the survey. Once the participants were satisfied, they were asked to sign the written consent form and then were requested to proceed with the responses. Data collection was mostly anonymous. However, those participants seeking any discussion based on study were asked to indicate their initials of their name for easy identification of the response sheet. At the end of the administration debriefing was done and the participants were provided information regarding the availability of the investigator for further clarification, if any, via email or in person. A few participants emailed the researcher requesting individual feedback on their scores on various measures. A brief interpretation of the scores based on the norms of the respective measures were provided to the participants with an option of meeting the researcher in person if they need more discussion on their scores. However, none turned up or requested a meeting.

Measures

Big Five Locator

The Big Five Locator was developed (Howard, Medina, & Howard, 1996) as a quick measure of personality factors on five dimensions viz. Negative Emotionality, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness in line with NEO-PI (Costa & McCrae, 1992). The items were measured on a 5 point Likert Scale with 5 items on each dimension. The minimum score under each dimension was 5 and the maximum was 25. Higher score in a dimension reveals higher tendency in the respective trait shown by the individual. Test-retest reliability established by the authors showed that the scale is sufficiently reliable ($r \geq 0.728$) and Cronbach alpha ranges from 0.63 to 0.77 for different dimensions. The scale showed a moderate correlation with NEO FFI ($r = 0.40$).

Attachment Style Questionnaire (ASQ)

The Attachment Style Questionnaire (Van Oudenhoven, Hofstra, & Bakker, 2003) based on Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) model of attachment, was utilized to assess the attachment styles of youth. The ASQ measures attachment style in four dimensions namely secure attachment style (8 items), fearful attachment style (4 items), preoccupied attachment style (5 items) and dismissing attachment style (5 items) on a five point Likert scale. The raw score ranged from 22-110. Higher score in a dimension indicates the individual's higher inclination in the respective style. Construct validity and the stability of the ASQ, as reported by the authors, measured after 1 year, was found to be 0.63, 0.60, 0.69, and 0.63 respectively for secure, fearful, preoccupied and dismissing styles. The alpha coefficients of the secure, fearful, preoccupied and dismissing scales were 0.73, 0.80, 0.78 and 0.65 respectively.

Interpersonal Attraction Scale (IPA) (Revised)

The Interpersonal Attraction Scale was originally developed by McCroskey and McCain (1974) and was subsequently revised by McCroskey, McCroskey, and Richmond (2006). The revised IPA is a self-report, 15 item measure of interpersonal attraction consisting of three dimensions viz., physical, social and task attraction, with five items on each dimension. It measured the interpersonal attraction on a 7-point scale with a score range of 15 to 105. Higher score in a dimension indicates that the individual had higher attraction in that dimension. Cronbach alpha values provided by the authors ranged from 0.67 to 0.93 on social attraction, 0.66 to 0.95 on physical attraction and 0.69 to 0.90 on task attraction.

Social Influence on Romantic Relationship Scale (SIRRS)

The SIRRS is a self-report measure of media and peer influence on romantic relationship (Ganth, 2013). It consists of 16 items on a five point Likert scale with two dimensions namely media influence and peer influence with eight items on each dimension. The media influence subscale consists of items such as “Movies on romantic themes are my favorites”, “I think social networking through internet is a tool to develop romantic relationships”. Items on peer influence include “I think my friends accept me better when I have boyfriend/girlfriend”; “I think friends are the real supporters when you are in romantic relationship. Alpha coefficient for the full scale was found to be 0.83 and 0.72, and 0.78 for media and peer influence respectively. The scores of SIRRS were correlated with the Interpersonal Attraction Scale (McCroskey, McCroskey, & Richmond, 2006) and the correlation coefficient was found to be 0.35 and 0.36 for media and peer influence respectively, indicating moderate correlation and acceptable convergent validity.

Romantic Inclination Scale (RIS)

As stated earlier, the study used the construct of romantic inclination to examine romantic relationship. RIS was developed in an earlier study by the authors (Ganth & Kadiravan, 2013) in Indian context. Romantic inclination can be operationalized as “a degree to which an individual is inclined to initiate or accept a romantic relationship with a member of opposite sex”. It involves a set of positive attitudes towards love and love marriages, a strong interpersonal attraction towards opposite sex, craving for an exclusive romantic relationship and involves marriage ideation and fantasy thoughts about the partner. The RIS consists of 38 items exploring into attitude, beliefs and desire towards romantic pursuits of youth such as “Romantic love brings beauty to life.”, “Being in love with someone adds purpose to life”. It also involves items related to marriage ideation, match making and fantasy thoughts about the partner such as “Being in a romantic relationship before marriage is healthy for married life”; “Marriages without love are meaningless”. Internal consistency of the scale as measured by alpha coefficient was 0.85 and the test retest reliability established after a gap of four weeks was found to be 0.82. The scale showed moderate correlation of 0.42 with Attitude towards Love Scale (Knox & Sporkowski, 1968) indicating convergent validity.

Results

Table 2 shows the level of romantic inclination of the participants in this study. Considering the score range, the mean value of 135.15 suggests that participants had shown higher level of romantic inclination. It can be inferred that majority of students (68.3%) had reported that they had experienced romantic relationship and hence been categorized as ‘lovers’. The prevalence was higher among males than females. This result

indicated that the increasing trend of interest among youth compared to previous studies reported in Indian context showing lower levels of prevalence of romantic involvement.

Table 2

Descriptive Analysis of Romantic Inclination by Gender and Love Status

Love Status	N (%)			M (SD)
	Male	Female	Total	
Lovers	295 (37.86)	237 (30.42)	532 (68.30)	139.40 (18.35)
Non Lovers	109 (13.99)	138 (17.71)	247 (31.70)	126.12 (23.79)
All	404 (51.90)	375 (48.10)	779 (100.00)	135.15 (21.60)

Note. Romantic Inclination Scale (RIS) score range = 38 – 190.

Table 3 shows the differences in the level of romantic inclination among youth based on different demographic as well as relationship categories.

Table 3

Differences in Romantic Inclination by Demographic and Relationship Categories

Variable	Category	N	M	SD	t
Gender	Male	404	140.38	18.73	7.36**
	Female	375	129.59	22.16	
Family Type	Joint family	256	134.11	24.15	0.99
	Nuclear family	523	135.72	19.51	
Parents' Type of Marriage	Love Marriage	300	138.74	18.88	2.35*
	Arranged Marriage	479	134.68	20.44	
Love Status	Lovers	532	139.40	18.35	8.53**
	Non-Lovers	247	126.12	23.79	
Close Friends' Current Love Status	Friends in Love	598	136.83	21.17	3.98**
	Friends not in Love	181	129.76	20.16	
Type of Residence	Hosteller	339	136.50	19.41	1.52
	Day Scholar	440	134.18	22.35	

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

The significant gender difference in romantic inclination shows that male students were more inclined towards romantic relationship than their female counterparts were. No significant difference was found in romantic inclination for students hailing from joint and nuclear families. Further, it was found that youth significantly

differed in their romantic inclination with regard to parent's type of marriage. Students whose parents had a love marriage tend to be more inclined for romantic relationship. An examination of the above table also indicates that, students who had already experienced romantic relationships (Lovers) tend to have higher level of romantic inclination than those who did not experience romance (Non-Lovers). Interestingly, romantic inclination is significantly higher not only in the case of students who have experienced love, but also higher when their close friends were in romantic relationships. Moreover, it is observed that type of residence did not discriminate the level of romantic inclination. Students residing in hostels and day scholars do not differ significantly in their romantic inclination.

It is evident from Table 4 that romantic inclination is significantly correlated to all the variables with highest coefficients for peer (0.54) and media influence (0.53) followed by secure attachment and physical attraction at the level of 0.33 and 0.36 respectively. Among the personality variables agreeableness, extroversion and openness to experiences had a stronger correlation than negative emotionality and conscientiousness indicating relatively weak links of these variables with romantic inclination. Among the intercorrelations among the key variables, the relationship of conscientiousness was inconsistent and was not correlated with various dimensions of the key variables except for dismissive attachment and task attraction.

Table 4

Correlation Matrix for Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Negative emotionality	–													
2. Agreeableness	.045	–												
3. Extraversion	.097**	.433**	–											
4. Openness to experience	.260**	.185**	.222**	–										
5. Conscientiousness	.083*	.274**	.195**	.068	–									
6. Secure attachment	.081*	.157**	.165**	.145**	.060	–								
7. Preoccupied attachment	.201**	.057	.103**	.140**	.030	.405**	–							
8. Fearful attachment	.212**	-.019	.010	.089*	.063	.332**	.461**	–						
9. Dismissive attachment	.041	-.016	.029	.081*	.133**	.363**	.334**	.384**	–					
10. Media influence	.148**	.132**	.136**	.122**	.060	.264**	.240**	.188**	.084*	–				
11. Peer influence	.121**	.131**	.079*	.105**	.022	.307**	.265**	.211**	.107**	.584**	–			
12. Physical attraction	.018	.132**	.151**	.108**	.017	.303**	.258**	.206**	.204**	.353**	.331**	–		
13. Social attraction	.190**	.079*	.118**	.124**	.031	.333**	.356**	.304**	.185**	.237**	.257**	.433**	–	
14. Task attraction	.106**	.074*	.094**	.093**	.073*	.317**	.309**	.286**	.180**	.203**	.249**	.457**	.418**	–
15. Romantic inclination	.140**	.249**	.238**	.228**	.111**	.332**	.217**	.157**	.153**	.528**	.537**	.358**	.239**	.187**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

To further understand the association of key variables in predicting romantic inclination, linear regression analysis was carried out with romantic inclination as the outcome variable.

Table 5 indicates that peer and media influence emerged as strong predictors of romantic inclination. Among the personality factors, agreeableness, extraversion and openness to experience showed significant influence. Among the interpersonal factors, secure attachment and physical attraction significantly predicted romantic inclination. Other variables did not show significant values with the outcome variable and hence are not presented above.

Table 5

Influence of Predictor Variables on Romantic Inclination: Regression Analysis

Predictor Variable	B	SE B	β	t	95% CI	
Peer Influence	.97	.12	0.30	8.43*	0.74	1.19
Media Influence	.89	.12	0.26	7.48*	0.66	1.12
Extraversion	.47	.17	0.08	2.77*	0.13	0.79
Secure Attachment	.41	.12	0.10	3.33*	0.17	0.65
Openness to Experience	.58	.16	0.10	3.68*	0.27	0.88
Physical Attraction	.41	.12	0.10	3.43*	0.17	0.64
Agreeableness	.54	.18	0.09	2.97*	0.18	0.90

Note. Model Summary: $R = 0.66$, $R^2 = 0.43$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.42$, $F = 82.86$, $a = 42.97$, $p < .01$.

* $p < .01$.

In order to explore and identify the structural and causal relationship among the variables, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was performed to examine how the data fits a hypothetical model for romantic inclination and romantic relationship status (love status) as outcomes, involving the selected predictor variables. In the model, individual and interpersonal factors measured in terms of personality, attachment style and interpersonal attraction were construed as exogenous variables. Social factors such as media influence and peer influence were considered as distal factors and hypothesized as mediators of romantic inclination in the model. In addition, in the model, it was construed that romantic inclination predicts love status significantly.

We had four latent variables in the model namely personality, attachment style, interpersonal attraction and social influence of romantic relationship. Among them personality had five indicators (dimensions), attachment style had four indicators, interpersonal attraction had three and social influence of romantic relationship had two indicators. All the indicators were included in the model and were analyzed for satisfactory fit. It was found, at the first level of analysis with all the indicators of latent variables that the model fit indices were close to the acceptable values: CFI = 0.88; NFI = 0.84; and RMSEA = 0.58. However, these values suggest the scope for theoretically meaningful model modification.

In order to make the model more meaningful and to improve the overall fit of the model, we trimmed the model by removing indicators with non-significant and weak coefficients from the model (Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2008). As such, we removed two indicators from personality factors (negative emotionality & conscientiousness), two from ASQ (fearful and dismissing styles) and social attraction from IPA, as they showed either non-significant or weak path coefficients (<0.10). We avoided any change in the model using modification indices to improve the model fit. Finally, a model (Table 6) with latent and observed variables as shown in Figure 1 emerged with acceptable level of fit indices.

Table 6

Model Fit Summary for Structural Equation Modeling

χ^2	df	CFI	NFI	RMSEA
82.1	35	0.97	0.95	0.04

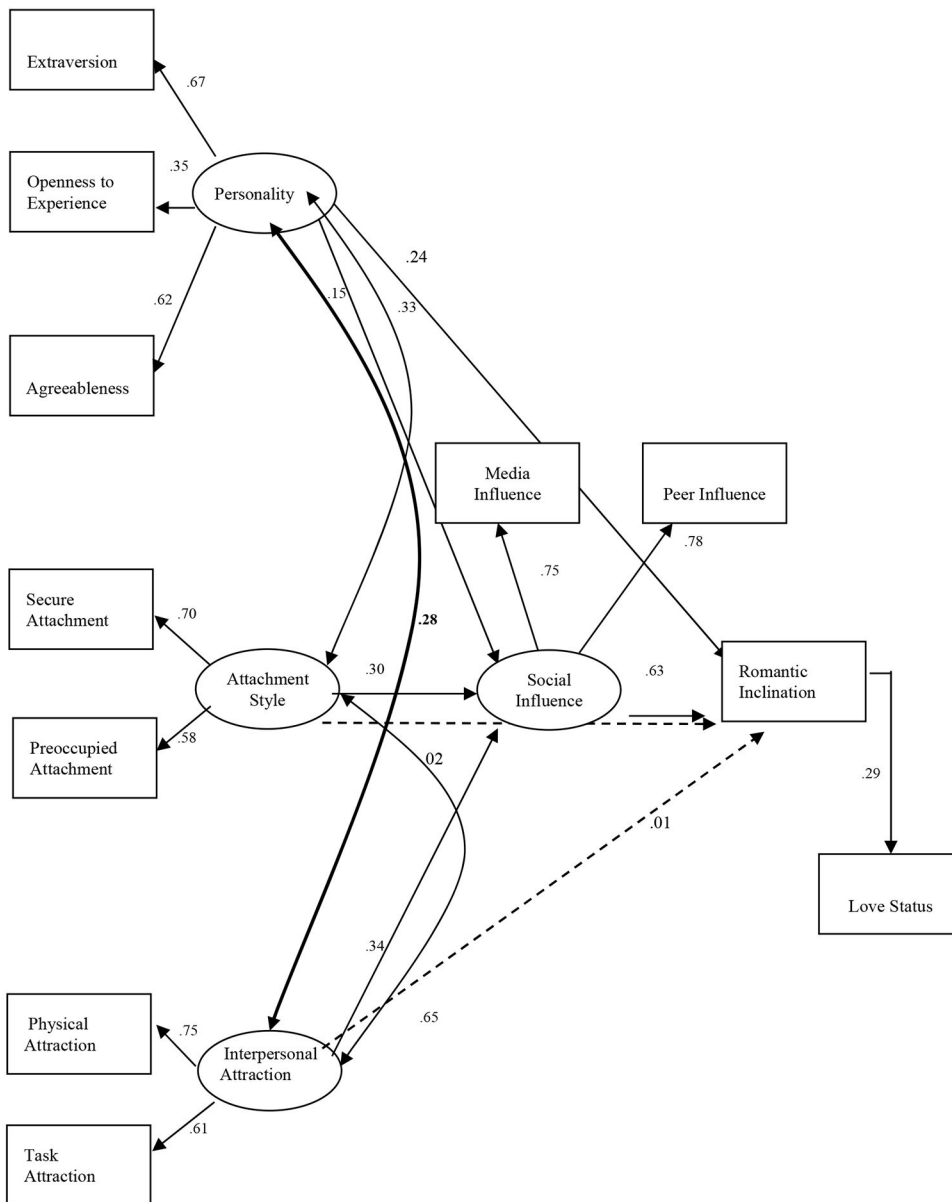


Figure 1. Standardized path diagram for structural equation modeling.

Note. Dotted lines: Non-Significant Path. Error terms are not shown for brevity.

This model shed more light on the findings of the results of correlation and regression analysis suggesting the structural and causal relationship between the variables. It is evident from the model that among the proximal factors namely personality, attachment style and interpersonal attraction, the role of personality is stronger in predicting romantic inclination (0.24) compared to insignificant and weak direct paths shown by attachment style and interpersonal attraction (0.02 & 0.01 respectively). However, perusal of Table 7 indicates that attachment style and interpersonal attraction show a higher indirect effect (0.19 & 0.22 respectively) comparable to that of personality factors indicating that these variables exert indirect influence on romantic inclination. This implies that these variables influence romantic inclination through the mediating variables i.e. media and peer influences.

Table 7

Direct, Indirect and Total Effect on Romantic Inclination by Exogenous Variables

Effect	Personality	Attachment Style	Interpersonal Attraction	Social Influence
Direct	0.24	0.02	0.01	0.63
Indirect	0.03	0.19	0.22	–
Total	0.27	0.21	0.23	0.63

The strong predictive values of media and peer influences shown by regression results found to be confirmed in SEM and these variables play a mediating role in predicting romantic inclination with a direct path coefficient of 0.63. In addition, SEM results indicate that romantic inclination predicts love status significantly with a path coefficient of 0.29.

Discussion

The results of the present study revealed the eagerness and a state of readiness of Indian youth in developing romantic relationships despite strict sanctions for marriage of choice prevailing in the country and mounting negative attitude as well as pressure from parents, elders and teachers. The results clearly indicated the liberalized attitude of youth in partner selection and the need for freedom of choice in their marriage, in line with studies conducted in India among college students reporting similar trends (Abraham & Kumar, 1999; Alexander et al., 2007; International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and Population Council, 2010). However, in the present study, we found a higher prevalence of romantic relationship among youth (68%) compared to the above studies in India which reported the prevalence ranging from 17% to 34% among men and 13% to 24% among women. This higher prevalence might be due to most of those studies were conducted in a community setting whereas the present study was carried out in an institutional setting where more opportunities exist for cross-sex interactions. That men showed significantly higher level of romantic inclination indicated the cultural advantage for men to be overt in matters pertaining to partner selection as the traditional norms in India are more tolerant when 'boys look for a girlfriend' than 'Girls look for a boyfriend'. Girls are expected to be gatekeepers in a traditional society like India (Dhariwal & Connolly, 2013) which makes boys long for romantic approval more than girls do

(Fisher, Brown, Aron, Strong, & Mashek, 2010). This result too goes in line with the finding of previous researches in India (Abraham & Kumar, 1999; International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and Population Council, 2010) which found that men showed more interest in developing romantic relationship when compared to women. The gender difference among youth has been consistently reported in studies in other cultures too, however, such differences are not with regard to desire or inclination for a relationship but with specific preferences in the partner, For example, Shulman and Scharf (2000) reported that Italian girls emphasized more attachment and care and showed higher level of affective intensity in romantic relationship than boys. On the other hand, boys reported engaging in shorter relationship than long lasting relationship. They also preferred higher level of passion-oriented and game-playing love styles whereas girls showed higher level of commitment-oriented style in love.

Another striking finding with regard to romantic inclination of youth is the differences by parent's type of marriage and close friend's love status. Higher level of romantic inclination when parents had a love marriage indicated the implicit motivation of their wards to be inclined more towards romantic relationships for themselves. The fact that parents had a love marriage might reduce the fear of confronting parents in case of a romantic relationship and induce hope in the acceptance of such relationship by the parents. We also found that romantic inclination is significantly higher for those whose close friends are in a current romantic relationship, which indicated the influence of peers in development of interest in romantic relationship. This result adds to the knowledge on peer influence in romantic relationship established through previous studies (Connolly, Furman, & Konarski, 2000; Zimmer-Gembeck, Siebenbruner, & Collins, 2004). These studies indicated that both peer network involving mixed sex friends and same sex friends influences the romantic relationship among youth. It was found that romantic involvement was positively associated with perceived support from one's own network of family and friends and perceived support from the partner's network.

It was on expected lines that 'lovers' would show more romantic inclination than 'non-lovers'. Given that, romantic inclination refers to the propensity toward developing an actual romantic relationship, the higher scores of 'lovers' signifies the construct of romantic inclination among youth who had already experienced romantic relationship and differentiates them from those who had never had a romantic relationship. As Fazio, Powell, and Williams (1989) pointed out, attitude leads to behavior consistent with the attitude. In this case, romantic inclination being a positive attitude towards romantic relationship might influence the development of romantic relationship among youth. However, current study being a cross-sectional one might not be able to ascertain the causal link between romantic inclination and relationship status or suggest any directional attributions. Future studies with longitudinal framework could examine such a link.

Further, the level of romantic inclination was not significantly different based on type of family and residential status of youth. This lack of difference in romantic inclination based on family type can be attributed to the social changes happened in the milieu of family system, liberalized mass media and social networking. The differences in joint family and nuclear family setting is fast waning and the attention on the youth is minimized as the youth at home spends most of the time with electronic gadgets, communication devices and internet based social networking, while the elders at home are busy with television based entertainment media. In addition, access to media, communication and formation of peer network are common for all the youth irrespective of their family type. Previous studies in India have found that family level variables do influence the premarital relationship among youth (Alexander et al., 2007) although they did not focus on the type of family. This goes against the popular belief that youth being raised in a nuclear family look out for new relationship outside the family (International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and Population Council, 2010). The lack of significant difference in romantic inclination among hostellers and day-scholars is against a common belief that hostellers enjoy more freedom and hence would be more inclined for a romantic relationship than day-scholars. This shows that romantic interests of the youth develop outside the purview of the residential status.

It is evident from the correlation and regression results that romantic inclination is associated with key individual, interpersonal and social level variables. Previous researches have linked the role of personality to romantic experiences. Studies have reported that antecedent personality traits influence relationship experiences (Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2002). Among the personality factors, extraversion, openness to experience and agreeableness have been consistently associated with romantic relationship parameters (White, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 2004). Romantic inclination is a tendency to develop an intimate relationship with

the partner. The personality factors of extraversion and agreeableness are directly connected to the social need of an individual and in this context, their influence on romantic inclination is consistent with literature. Openness to experience as a predictor indicated that imaginative thinking, creative and innovative ideas foster romantic interests as romantic relationship involves elements of fantasy, beauty and admiration.

The predictive role of media and peer influences is an important finding of the regression analysis. It shows the powerful influence of both mass media and personalized media like social networking through internet in developing romantic relationship among youth. The influence of peer group and media has been well documented in previous researches in India and the west (e.g. [Alexander et al., 2006](#); [Arnett, 2002](#); [Dhariwal & Connolly, 2013](#)). Peer group has always been identified as key social group in influencing the behavior of youth. Youth considers the peers as partners, advisors and supporters. They spend considerable amount of time with friends than their parents and siblings. This brings a tremendous influence on their interest, attitude and behavior in the context of romantic and sexual experiences. On the other hand, access to electronic gadgets and media amplifies the westernization of youth in India, which fosters cross-sex socialization and liberal romantic and sexual attitudes ([L'Engle, Brown, & Kenneavy, 2006](#)).

Previous studies consistently report the link between attachment style with various form of love ([Feeney & Noller, 1990](#)). Secure attachment as a predictor of romantic inclination signifies its role as inner confidence and trust in romantic relationship. Studies on attachment in romantic relationship showed that youth transfer their attachment from parenthood to romantic partners and best friends (e.g. [Hazan & Shaver, 1987](#)). Studies examining transfer of attachment among youth identified that parents are the primary attachment figures but were later in the course of shifting attachment related functions to their peers that included best friends and romantic partners. This shift increased with the duration of the relationship ([Fraley, Davis, & Shaver, 1997](#)). Romantic relationship involves trust, intimacy and commitment between the partners and secure attachment provides the emotional security to this relationship. Secure attachment builds confidence and positive feelings about partner and provides emotional involvement in a relationship. Though secure attachment favors romantic relationship and relationship satisfaction, other styles of attachment too show link to romantic involvement. In a longitudinal study, [Tracy, Shaver, Albino, and Cooper \(2003\)](#) examined the link between the attachment style and adolescent sexuality. The results showed that avoidant adolescents were least likely to be currently involved in a romantic relationship. Anxious adolescents were frequently been in love. Among dating adolescents secure reported most frequent dating, a consequence of their being more likely to be in a long-term relationship. Anxiously attached girls had the most sexual experience and securely attached boys had the most sexual experience.

The significant role of physical attraction in romantic inclination reveals that a physically attractive prospective partner kindles the romantic feelings and fantasy in one self. Physical attraction towards the partner provides the first step in developing interest and attraction towards the partner. An assessment of the physical attributes of the potential partner is a quick mate selection strategy with the physical feature being a readily available data in hand. Assessment of the partner for other attributes such as compatibility and social functioning are elusive and demands investment of commitment and time. Studies with the evolutionary perspective have consistently shown the salience of physical features in mate selection ([Buss, 2008](#); [Gangestad & Scheyd, 2005](#)). Both men and women use physical features as important criteria for short term mate selection, however, they include additional criteria in a long term bond ([Li & Kenrick, 2006](#)). In a meta-analysis, [Feingold \(1992\)](#) found that women accorded more weight than men to socioeconomic status (SES), ambitiousness, character, and

intelligence, and the largest gender differences were observed for cues to resource acquisition (status, ambitiousness). The findings were generally invariant across generations, cultures, and research paradigms. On priorities on romantic attraction, men emphasized on physical attractiveness while women on sense of humor with physical attractiveness (Lundy, Tan, & Cunningham, 1998). Pierce (1996) studied body height and romantic attraction and found that females showed greater effect of body height when it came to dating or mating preferences. The study also supported the male-taller norm in romantic attraction. Physical proximity, admiration of the physical attributes, physical closeness and intimacy are some of the dominant needs in a romantic relationship. This places physical attraction at the center, at least during the early stages of relationship.

The SEM model sheds some light on individual, interpersonal and social determinants of romantic inclination. The role of personality dimensions in developing romantic relationship shows that love is endogenous and individual personality differences play a crucial role in determining romantic interests. The role of attachment style and interpersonal attraction shows the interplay of intra individual and interpersonal factors in romance. The strong mediating role of media and peer influence emphasizes the role of access to social media and peer network interaction in fostering romantic inclination. Such a mediation of media and peer group had been reported in previous studies. For example, in a cross-cultural study involving Indian and American youth, Dhariwal and Connolly (2013) found that friends and media mediated the association between culture and romantic activities both independently and in combination with each other. They also reported that Indian young adults from a westernized context were more likely to consume Western and social media, and possess friends fostering permissive expectations, greater cross-sex network composition, and intimate communication.

In regards to the limitation of the study, assumptions about the directionality in SEM should be understood with caution due to cross sectional nature of the data. Although we observed participants were enthusiastic and free from any inhibition in responding to the measures, we suspect an element of under reporting by participants especially on items exploring romantic and sexual intimacy and relationship status.

Conclusion and Further Considerations

The present study is one of the few studies exploring the romantic interests of and its correlates of youth in India. The study, provides empirical evidence for weakening cultural norms against romantic interests among young adults and throws light on the relative influences of personal, interpersonal and social factors on romantic inclination of Indian youth. The results also highlighted the mediating role of media and peer group in determining the romantic interests of youth.

The results could have implication for students' mental health interventions initiatives and provide insights to teachers, parents, student counselors and policy makers in higher education in India about the potential psychosocial and developmental determinants of romantic relationship in Indian context. However, in future, studies in India might consider involving students drawn from community as compared to one large university as in the present study. The role of romantic inclination can be further studied involving other individual, interpersonal and social variables. Also, longitudinal studies may be conducted to assess the predictive validity of romantic inclination in the development of romantic relationship. The role of media and peer group influence can further be studied in Indian context using both qualitative and quantitative designs to develop a comprehensive model on social influences on romantic relationships.

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Competing Interests

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