FEAR OF INTIMACY AND VIRTUAL INTIMACY AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

Dissertation submitted to Kerala University

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of

M. Sc. Counselling Psychology

By

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the Dissertation entitled " **Fear of Intimacy and Virtual Intimacy among College Students"** is an authentic work carried out by Preetha. P , Reg. No. 60421115019 under the guidance of Dr. Pramod S K during the fourth semester of M.Sc. Counselling Psychology programme in the academic year 2021- 2023.

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DECLARATION

I, Preetha. P , do hereby declare that the dissertation titled "**Fear of Intimacy and Virtual Intimacy among College Students",** submitted to the Department of Counselling Psychology, Loyola College of Social Sciences, Sreekariyam, under the supervision of Dr Pramod S K, Assistant professor of the Department of Counselling Psychology, for the award of the degree of Master's in Science of Counselling Psychology, is a bonafide work carried out by me and no part thereof has been submitted for the award of any other degree in any University.

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                                                                                        M.Sc. Counselling Psychology

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ABSTRACT

The study entitled as 'Fear of Intimacy and Virtual Intimacy among college Students' was conducted in Kerala. The purpose of study was to access the relationship between Fear of intimacy and Virtual Intimacy among college students. The data was collected from 153 college students using personal data sheet, Fear of Intimacy scale and Virtual Intimacy scale. The result indicated that there is a statistically significant difference in Virtual Intimacy amongcollege students. No obvious difference was observed based on type of college and course of study. There is no correlation found in relationship between Fear of Intimacy and Virtual Intimacy among college students. The results from the study can help to provide guidance andcounselling to the professions who are having Fear of Intimacy symptoms and can also be usedto plan further research in this area.

Key words : Fear of Intimacy, Virtual Intimacy, college students.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

College students are a diverse group of young individuals pursuing higher education in various academic disciplines. They are typically between the ages of 18 and 25, transitioning from adolescence to adulthood. They come from diverse cultural, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds, bringing a range of experiences and perspectives to campus (Amett, 2015). During this phase, they are in the process of identity formation and actively seek to define their values, beliefs, and goals (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). College life offers unique opportunities for learning, growth, and exploration, shaping the future of these students and society as a whole. This period in their lives is often marked by significant personal and academic growth, as they navigate new responsibilities, independence and educational opportunities. Recognizing the characteristics, challenges, and aspirations of college student is crucial for educators, policymakers, and institutions to provide appropriate support and resource that facilitate their success and well-being.

Social media is now an important part of students' lives, shaping the way students communicate, share information and interact with the world. It provides them with a platform to connect and communicate with peers, family, and friends, regardless of physical distance. It facilitates instant messaging, video calls, and group discussions, promoting collaboration and fostering relationships within and beyond campus boundaries (junco, R., & Cotton, S.R., 2012). Social media allows students to access a vast array of information, news, and educational resources. They can follow academic institutions, research organizations and subject matter experts to stay updated on the latest development in their field of study. This exposure can

broaden their knowledge and encourage intellectual discussions (Carpenter, J., & Krutka, D.G., 2015).

Ofcom (2008) notes that the continued and rapid growth of social networks, which have been practical over the past few years, indicates their entry into mainstream culture and their assimilation into the daily lives of many people. In parallel with this, there has also been considerable media coverage of the escalation of social networking, its potential positive outcomes and concerns about the way that some people are utilizing it.

In addition, social networking sites offer people new and diverse ways to communicate via the internet, whether through their personal computer or their mobile phone. It allows people to easily and easily create their own online page or profile, and to create and display a network of online contacts, often referred to as friends. Users of these sites can communicate through profiles with people who are not included in their friends and contact lists. This can be a one-to-one basis, or in a more public way such as a comment posted for all to see (Ofcom, 2008) In contrast, daily social interaction with family and friends now primarily occurs through Internet and mobile applications like email, instant messaging, and video chat (Broadbent, 2012; Wilding, 2006). The most potent online media in the world are thought to be virtual social networks. The ability of this network to establish frequent, organized networks among friends and people who share similar interests sets it apart from others (Ziaeeparvar, 2009). Today, social connection between individuals extends to online social networks, and consumers use these platforms mostly for virtual communications. These include podcasts, wikis, social networks, blogs, and wikis. Virtual media are bound to play a bigger part in determining how we interact and experience the digital world in the future as it develops. However, it also raises issues like privacy issues, false information, and the requirement for digital literacy.

Intimate relationships are one of the most important contributors to wellbeing and optimal functioning among human beings (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Bowlby, 1998). A genuinely intimate relationship involves shared disclosure, responsiveness to another's needs, mutual acceptance and respect, as well as balance between emotional closeness and separateness (Harvey & Omarzu, 1997; Orlofsky & Roades, 1993; Reis & Patrick, 1996). Intimacy is highly idealized in close relationships (Campbell et al. 2008); however, not everyone engaged in relationships with an optimal balance of closeness and individuality.

Intimacy, according to Erikson (1950), 'is the ability of committing oneself to specific affiliations and relationships and acquire the ethical courage that allows one to abide by these commitments even though they may require significant sacrifices and compromises.' Intimacy can be characterized as a dyadic exchange that entails sharing personal and private information in a wide sense (Prager, 1995). Only by integrating content, emotional value, and sensitivity can intimacy be built (Descutner & Thelen, 1991). It can be experienced in the context of close relationships and interactions that include spoken and non-spoken language as well as shared behavioral, emotional, physical, and cognitive experiences (Prager, 1995). The word intimacy is open to interpretation; it can refer to a variety of connections, including the familiarity that develops between mother and child as they exchange both emotional and physical care. When it comes to a different, more prevalent use, intimacy is generally related with having deep emotional connections, like love, with the individual in question (Jamieson, 2007). People typically invest a lot of time and energy into developing intimacy with others (Vangelisti & Beck, 2007). Intimacy is the lifeline of close relationships and a fundamental human desire that is thought to be crucial for survival, reproduction, and well-being (Baumeister, Leary 1995).

The experiences of close relationships are a global phenomenon, and the ways in which they manifest themselves are influenced by several social, cultural, and personal aspects (Fallahchai et al., 2017). The fear of intimacy is another personal characteristic that influences

people's ability to establish and maintain close relationships (Descutner & Thelen,1991). The majority of people struggle with loneliness and a fear of intimacy (Firestone & Catlett, 1999). The ability of a person to communicate deeply personal ideas and feelings with someone who is highly esteemed is hampered by fear of intimacy (Descutner & Thelen, 1991). Fear of intimacy refers to the anxiety-induced restriction of a person's ability to communicate with an additional highly valued human about personally significant ideas and feelings. Three factors were considered while defining the fear of intimacy: (i) content, which refers to the exchange of personal details; (ii) emotional value, which refers to intense emotions about the personal details communicated; and (iii) sensitivity, which refers to a high regard for other people. Fear of intimacy deters people from forming new connections as well as impairs the quality of those that already exist. It would undoubtedly be challenging for those who avoid or reject intimacy to create warm or fulfilling connections with others (Martin & Ashby, 2004). Several phobias or fears, like the fear of rejection, the fear of being exposed, and the fear of getting hurt or deceived, are usually present alongside the fear of intimacy. These concerns might manifest in a number of ways, such as an inability to express one's emotions or an urge to distance oneself from others (Thelen et al., 2000). According to Firestone and Catlett (1999), early-life negative attitudes towards oneself and others are the basis of one's fear of intimacy. People who fear intimacy have trouble creating and sustaining relationships.

Loneliness can be a result of fear of intimacy. People who suffer from loneliness may be particularly at a disadvantage when it comes to problem solving because they fear what they are trying to achieve (Vangelisti & Beck, 2007). Fear of intimacy is closely related to loneliness, low self-disclosure, and low social intimacy (Descutner & Thelen, 1991). Hatfield (1984) listed various reasons for fear of intimacy. The first of these reasons is the fear of exposure. People assume that with the help of transmitted information they will investigate all other people's mistakes. The second reason for fear of intimacy is the fear of abandonment.

Individual experience a concern that they will be left when others know them very well. Other reason is fear of angry attacks, individuals have anxiety that everything they say will be used against them. Many other reasons include fear of losing control, fear of one's own destructive impulses, and fear of losing individuality.

Personal development is impacted by the fear of intimacy. Those with fear of intimacy may avoid social interactions or isolate themselves to prevent getting close to others. This isolation can lead to feelings of loneliness and contribute to a sense of detachment from the world around them. The fear of being vulnerable and exposed in a close relationship can lead to chronic worry and sadness. Fear of intimacy contributes low self-esteem and negative self - image. Individuals may engage in avoidance behavior, such as avoiding emotional discussions or evading situations that require emotional openness. This can hinder effective communication and problem-solving in relationships. The stress and emotional turmoil associated with fear of intimacy can potentially impact physical health, contributing to issues like insomnia, headaches, and even a weakened immune system. People with fear of intimacy may find it challenging to express their emotions or needs, leading to misunderstandings and conflicts in relationships.

In recent years, the advent of virtual communication platforms and social media has transformed the way college students interact and form relationships. Virtual intimacy, also known as digital intimacy, refers to the emotional closeness and connections that individuals can experience through online interactions. With the rise of dating apps, online communities, however, virtual intimacy also presents unique challenges. The absence of physical presence and non-verbal cues can make it difficult to fully gauge and understand someone's emotions and intentions. Moreover, the curated nature of social media profiles and online personas can create a false sense of intimacy, leading to a potential disconnect between online interactions and real-life relationships.

According to research, individuals who have close, personal connections are more likely to be in good physical and mental health than those who don't (Reis, 1984). It's not necessary to limit intimacy to a purely romantic or sexual relationship. As opposed to just the body, it instead alludes to an accessibility of the self and of one's own space (Jamieson,1998; Stoler,2006). It is possible to think of the establishment and upkeep of close social ties as an ongoing interpersonal process between two people. Over the past few decades, improvements in Internet-based connectivity and social networking programmes have caused a significant shift in the way that people engage in social interactions. Novel methods to sense and actualize intimacy have emerged as a result of this change, both in relation to ongoing partnerships and dealing with strangers (Amichai-Hamburger, 2013; Steinfield et al., 2012; Zhong, 2011).

Virtual intimacy encompasses the emotional closeness, trust and connection that individuals develop through online interactions. It is rooted in the capacity of digital platforms to facilitate communication, self-disclosure, and social bonding. The evolution of communication technologies has provided diverse channels for individuals to connect, share experiences and express emotions. The perceived anonymity in online interactions can lower inhibitions, allowing individuals to share thoughts, feelings, and experiences that they might not disclose in face-to-face interactions. It has become crucial for maintaining emotional connections in long-distance relationships, enabling partners to bridge geographical gaps through constant communication. It helps individuals to overcome loneliness and enhances self-disclosure.

Virtual intimacy has transformed the landscape of human connections, offering opportunities for emotional bonding, support, and companionship across various online platforms. Its evolution is driven by communication technologies, shared interests, and the need to bridge geographical gaps. While virtual intimacy comes with benefits, it also raises challenges related to authenticity, privacy, and emotional depth. As society continues to

embrace digital interactions, the understanding of virtual intimacy's dynamics and its implications will play an increasingly significant role in shaping the future of human relationship.

Need and significance of the study

The purpose of the study is to understand fear of intimacy and virtual intimacy among college students. In the era of globalization, young adults can be seen as the stakeholders of a nation. According to NMHS 2015-16, approximately 15% of Indian people (those above the age of 18) require active interventions for one or more mental health problems. Thus, when compared to the general population, college students are more likely to suffer from mental health issues (Jain et al.2021).

College students tend to be interested in intimate or romantic relationships. Intimacy is essential in relationships because it forms the foundation of connection and communication. It ensures that each person feels understood, allows them to be themselves, and ensures that each person gets care and comfort that they need. For some, the pursuit of intimacy may be inhibited or adversely affected by anxiety. Research indicates that even though most people long for intimacy, not everyone is capable of achieving it (Weaver,1987). Ahmed Kamals' study on fear of intimacy as a mediator between anxiety and friendship in a sample of university students. The results revealed that fear of intimacy has an effect on friendship.

Researchers have argued that the need to form and maintain interpersonal relationships is a fundamental human motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000). People seek out and initiate social relationships without a great deal of prompting and they tend to resist the dissolution of social bonds. A relatively large body of literature suggests that intimate relationships are associated with individuals' psychological development and well-being. The capacity for intimacy has been identified by many theorists as one of the primary indicators of

psychological adjustment (Erikson, 1963; Maslow, 1968; Sullivan, 1953). Intimate relationships between infants and their caregivers provide infants with a secure base from which to explore their social world (Bowlby, 1969, 1973). Secure intimate attachment in infancy, in turn, is associated with the development of confidence and self-esteem (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Similarly, intimate relationships during adolescence and early adulthood are the basis for emotional integration (Erikson, 1963; Sullivan, 1953).

In adulthood, the availability of close social relationships serves as a buffer against stress (Cohen et al., 1986). Relative intimacy is positively related to personal satisfaction (Prager & Buhrmester, 1998) and well-being (Baumeister, 1991). Difficulties with intimacy and with establishing close, intimate relationships are associated with a wide variety of mental health problems, including general maladjustment and personality disorders (Firestone & Catlett, 1999; Fisher & Stricker, 1982). People who lack close, satisfying relationships also are relatively likely to be chronically lonely (Cutrona, 1982). In fact, loneliness is positively associated with a fear of intimacy (Descutner & Thelen, 1991).

It is evident that fear of intimacy negatively affects the individuals physical and psychological well-being. As virtual intimacy becomes more prevalent in the present world, it is important to understand how these technological advances shape social dynamics and relationships. Studying virtual intimacy among college students can provide valuable insights into the impact of technology on social interaction, communication patterns and emotional intimacy. In this context the researcher under the need of counselling for those having problems in maintaining or developing relationship with others.

Statement of the problem

The problem of the present study has been stated as "Fear of Intimacy and Virtual Intimacy among college students".

Operational definitions of key terms

Fear of intimacy

In this study, fear of intimacy refers to the avoidance of close relationship with others.

Virtual intimacy

In the present study, virtual intimacy refers to the infactuational relationship exhibited by individuals to unknown persons through social platforms.

Objectives of the study

- To understand the extent of fear of intimacy among college students.

- To understand the extent of virtual intimacy among college students.

- To assess the fear of intimacy among college students based on gender.

- To assess the virtual intimacy among college students based on gender.

- To assess the fear of intimacy among college students based on course of study.

- To assess the virtual intimacy among college students based on course of study.

- To assess the fear of intimacy among college students based on type of college.

- To assess the virtual intimacy among college students based on type of college.

- To find out any relationship between fear of intimacy and virtual intimacy among college students.

Hypothesis of the study

- There is no significant difference in fear of intimacy among college students based on gender.

- There is no significant difference in fear of intimacy among college students based on course of study.

- There is no significant difference in fear of intimacy among college students based on type of college.

- There is no significant difference in virtual intimacy among college students based on gender.

- There is no significant difference in virtual intimacy among college students based on course of study.

- There is no significant difference in virtual intimacy among college students based on type of college.

- There is no significant relationship between fear of intimacy and virtual intimacy among college students.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A systematic examination of a body of data already in existence that identifies, assesses, and synthesizes for clear presentation is referred to as a literature review (Fink, 2010). According to Jesson, et al., (2011), a literature review is a critical analysis and evaluation of a subject. This chapter has been discussed under two major headings i.e., Theoretical Review and Empirical Review of literature. The theoretical review explores various conceptual frameworks and models of the variables and the empirical review entails various empirical studies conducted by other researchers which are related to the current research. Therefore, the existing literature has been reviewed to understand the concepts and associations of the variables of interest.

Theoretical review

To understand the concepts of virtual intimacy and fear of intimacy it is necessary to review theoretical perspectives associated with the variables. In this section conceptual framework and various theories propounded by researchers in the line of study of the current research variables, are reviewed.

Fear of intimacy

Fear of intimacy is defined as "anxiety inhibits the ability to exchange thoughts and feelings with a personally significant other" (Descutner et al., 1991). "Psychological processes in a person" (Sherman et al., 1996).

Almost 30 years ago, Hatfield (1984) first discussed the concept of intimacy anxiety and described a fundamental aspect of intimacy fear that everyone shares to some extent. She argued that the underlying reasons for the fear of intimacy were fear of exposure, fear of

abandonment, fear of angry attacks, fear of loss of control, fear of one's own destructive impulses and a fear of losing one's individuality or of being engulfed. A fear of exposure relates to the information a partner will discover about another individual, which may include things that they may be embarrassed about. A fear of abandonment is the worry that a partner will leave once they have gotten to know too much about the person. Fear of angry attacks is the reluctance on the part of the individual to reveal information in a relationship, in case it may be used against them. The risk of intimacy may be too great if it has to do with your fear of losing control of the person. A fear of one's own destructive impulses relates to a fear of being in touch with what they are feeling, "that if they ever got in touch with what they are feeling, they would begin to cry or kill". Finally, a fear of losing one's individuality or of being engulfed is the fear of losing themselves in another, or being completely "engulfed by another.

An individual difference that affects people's ability to develop and maintain close relationships is their fear of intimacy (Descutner & Thelen, 1991). Firestone and Catlett (1999) suggest that intimacy anxiety is rooted in negative attitudes toward self and others that develop early in life. Similar to the inner workings' models proposed by attachment theorists, these negative attitudes are part of people's personalities, resist change to some extent and affect people's intimate relationships. For instance, individuals who fear intimacy have a restricted capacity to form and maintain close ties with others (Firestone & Firestone, 2004). There also may be a curvilinear association between individuals' individuals fear of intimacy and their desire for closeness. More specifically, Mashek and Sherman (2004) found that people who want less closeness and those who want more closeness in their relationships with others are more fearful of intimacy than are those who are relatively satisfied with the degree of closeness they have in their relationships.

Virtual Intimacy

Intimacy refers to the closeness, emotional connection, and warmth of a connection with a relationship partner (Ng 2017) and can be expressed in giving and receiving emotional support (Sternberg and Grajek 1984). Intimacy is the life blood of intimate relationships. Basic human needs (Baumeister and Leary, 1995) are considered evolutionarily important for well-being, survival, and procreation (Constant et al., 2018 & Malouff et al., 2012; Schoebi and Leary, 1995). Randall, 2015). The experience of intimacy is universal and shaped by a variety of personal, social and cultural factors (Fallahchai et al., 2017; Ng, 2017).

Intimacy is a term that encompasses a one-to-one exchange where something personal and private is shared (Prager, 1995). This can be realized in the context of intimate interactions and relationships involving shared behaviors, physical, emotional, and cognitive experiences, as well as verbal and non-verbal communication (Prager, 1995). Advances in Internet-based communication and social networking applications over the last several decades have leads to a major shift in the mode of human social engagement (Amichai-Hamburger, 2013: Steinfield et al. 2012: Zhong, 2011). These changes have led to new ways of experiencing and realizing intimacy both in the context of existing relationships and in the context of interactions with strangers. Physical intimacy and face-to-face contact are declining in everyday interpersonal relationships with loved ones (Holt-Lunstad et al. 2010: McPherson et al.2006: Putnam, 2000).

The advent of digital technologies has transformed the way individuals interact, communicate, and form relationships. In this digital landscape, virtual intimacy has emerged as a concept that captures the depth and quality of emotional connections established through online platforms (Smith & Anderson, 2018). Virtual intimacy encompasses a range of interactions, from text-based conversations to video calls and immersive virtual reality experiences.

Self-disclosure and intimacy

Self-disclosure plays an important role in developing intimacy. Self-disclosure refers to the process by which people tell others about themselves. Deriga and Grzelak (1979) define self-disclosure as "the exchange of all information relating to oneself, including one's personal state, mood, past events, and future plans." Research on self-disclosure has shown that the ability to reveal one's feelings and thoughts to others is a key skill in developing close relationships (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Berscheid & Walster, 1978). Self-disclosure has been found to promote caring and relationships (Berg & Deriega, 1987; Chelune, 1979). Lack of self-disclosure is often associated with dissatisfaction with one's social networks and loneliness (Stokes, 1987).

In considering individual differences in self-disclosure, research generally assesses the ability or willingness for self-disclosure. However, self-disclosure is a multidimensional concept (Berg & Deriega, 1987). The ability or willingness for self-disclosure can be either a trait (i.e., Archer, 1979) or a particular behavior in interpersonal situations (Solano, Batten, & Parish, 1982). Individual variations in self-disclosure can be variously manifested in the amount, intimacy level, and content of disclosed information and in the target of the self-disclosure (Cozby, 1972,1973).

Another basic dimension of self-disclosure is its flexibility, which reflects the ability to adequately attend to situational cues and adapt one's disclosing behavior accordingly. Disclosure flexibility has been related to social adjustment and mental health (Chaikin & Deriega, 1974; Chelune, 1979; Goodstein & Reinecker, 1974). In Chelune's (1977) terms, "The individual who is able to modulate his or her disclosures across a wider range of social situations in response to situational and interpersonal demands will function interpersonally

more adequately than the less flexible individual who has not learned the discriminant cues that signal whether disclosure is appropriate or inappropriate".

Individual differences have been found also in people's responses to another's self-disclosure. The most frequently cited response is disclosure reciprocity, i.e., the tendency of recipients of disclosure to respond by disclosing about themselves at a comparable level of intimacy. Reciprocity has been attributed to heightened trust of the discloser, attempts to maintain equity norms and modeling. Berg (1987) claimed that disclosure reciprocity depends on the extent to which people are responsive to other's disclosing behavior. The persons who show high responsiveness can match the intimacy of the information they receive from others. Individuals are attracted to a high intimate discloser only if they tend to value the goals of "becoming intimate with people and finding out more about and being liked by the people with whom he or she is interacting" (Berg, 1987).

Dimensions of Virtual Intimacy

Psychological Perspectives: Drawing from attachment theory, virtual intimacy can be seen as an extension of emotional closeness and bonding (Johnson & Dibble, 2020). Individuals seek and develop virtual attachments through online interactions, experiencing a sense of security and support similar to offline relationships. Additionally, socioemotional selectivity theory suggests that virtual intimacy provides a means for maintaining and enhancing social connections, particularly for individuals with limited offline opportunities (Carstensen et al., 2019).

Sociological Perspectives: From a sociological standpoint, virtual intimacy can be understood through the lens of social presence theory (Biocca et al., 2003). This theory posits that the degree of social presence in mediated communication determines the level of intimacy

experienced. Virtual intimacy is influenced by factors such as the richness of communication channels, the perception of nonverbal cues, and the degree of interactivity.

Manifestations of Virtual Intimacy

Online Communities and Social Networks: Virtual intimacy is often cultivated through participation in online communities and social networks (Bargh & McKenna, 2004). These platforms provide spaces for individuals to engage in self-disclosure, share personal experiences, and receive emotional support. The sense of belonging and connection fostered within these digital spaces contributes to the development of virtual intimacy.

Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality: Advancements in virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies have opened up new possibilities for immersive experiences and heightened virtual intimacy. VR environments can simulate physical presence and enable individuals to engage in shared activities, fostering a sense of togetherness and intimacy (Reinhard et al., 2021).

Implications of Virtual Intimacy

Relationship Formation and Maintenance: Virtual intimacy has implications for both the formation and maintenance of relationships. Online platforms provide opportunities for individuals to meet and connect with potential partners, transcending geographical boundaries (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012). Additionally, long-distance relationships can rely on virtual intimacy to bridge the physical gap and maintain emotional closeness (Stafford et al., 2020).

Psychological Well-being and Mental Health: Virtual intimacy can have both positive and negative effects on individuals' psychological well-being. On one hand, it can provide social support, reduce loneliness, and enhance self-esteem (Valkenburg & Peter, 2009). On the other hand, excessive reliance on virtual intimacy can lead to social isolation, relationship dissatisfaction, and even addiction (Andreassen et al., 2017).

Uncertainty Reduction Theory

Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT; Berger & Calabrese, 1975) states that uncertainty is unpleasant and people should reduce it in their interpersonal relationships. When individuals are considering a relationship, they wish to reduce the amount of uncertainty regarding the partner and the status of the relationship. Thus, interactions are driven by the goal of reducing uncertainty about the target and learning enough to predict his or her future behavior. As communication between partners increases, uncertainty is reduced and greater intimacy is experienced.

According to the URT, there are three phases of interaction: the entry phase, the personal phase, and the exit phase. The entry phase is guided by implicit and explicit rules for socially normative interaction. Communication is structured and typically symmetrical. Based on experience in the entry phase, the individual decides whether to continue to the next level. The personal phase typically takes place over the course of several encounters. During this time, individuals discuss attitudes, personal information, and begin to explore socially undesirable topics. Communication is more spontaneous and less structured. The exit phase is when individuals decide whether they will continue future interactions with this partner.

Uncertainty reduction may be accomplished via three strategies. Passive strategies include the unobtrusive gathering of data or any technique that does not involve interaction with the partner. Active strategies include asking a third party to provide information about the target or manipulating the environment to elicit information. Interactive strategies involve direct communication with the partner and soliciting self-disclosure.

Although many of URT's original theorems and axioms were not supported by subsequent research, it has served great heuristic value. One reformulation of URT suggests that it is not uncertainty that drives interactions. According to predicted outcome value theory,

the primary goal is to maximize the potential for desirable outcomes, and uncertainty reduction is a possible secondary goal. Anxiety and uncertainty management theory, on the other hand, suggests that anxiety was the underlying force driving uncertainty reduction and may interfere with communicative efforts. Another development is uncertainty management theory, which suggested that individuals may appraise uncertainty in many ways and then use various communicative acts to address that uncertainty.

Social Penetration Theory

The development of the theory of social penetration was carried out to explain the influence of information sharing on the development and collapse of interpersonal relations. Social penetration describes the bonding process that moves from superficial to more intimate relationships (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Social penetration is achieved through self-disclosure, the process of deliberately revealing information about oneself (Derlega et al., 1993). Self-disclosure increases the intimacy of a relationship to some extent. Social penetration can occur in a variety of contexts, including romantic relationships (Taylor & Altman, 1975, 1987), friendships, social groups (such as religious groups or football clubs), and work relationships. Online dating and virtual teams are examples of computer communication contexts where this theory has been applied.

The onion model is a useful metaphor for explaining how social penetration theory works, developing social penetration as a process in which people "peel" away from others' privacy layers through interpersonal interactions to get to the core. It takes time to get to the "core" of another person, to the most intimate details about another person. A public image is the outer shell of a person that many other people can see. The private self is the deepest layer of a person and is revealed only over time to significant others through disclosure. Social penetration theory describes several layers including a surface layer, a middle layer, an inner layer and a

core personality. The superficial layer consists of rather superficial information such as likes and dislikes of clothing and music. The middle layer includes political views and social attitudes. The inner layer includes spiritual values, deep fears, hopes, goals, illusions and secrets. The personality core contains the most personal information about a person.

Relationships require an exchange of information. Essential to social penetration is the breadth, number of topics discussed, depth, and degree of intimacy that guides these interactions. The scope includes the number of different topics discussed, such as discussions about family, hobbies, professional or educational backgrounds, and favorite foods. Depth includes the degree of intimacy that guides topical discussions, such as discussing a range of feelings related to family issues or life ambitions instead of non-intimate facts. These interactions are based on the norm of reciprocity. This norm of reciprocity suggests that when a person reveals something, the respondent has an obligation to reveal something with the same level of intimacy in order to maintain the norm or fairness.

Stages of Social Penetration and De-penetration

Self-disclosure passes through a number of phases as an interpersonal relationship progresses (Taylor & Altman, 1987). These stages of social penetration theory include orientation, exploratory affective exchange, affective exchange, and stable exchange. The first stage is orientation, when people share only superficial information, or the outermost layer, about themselves. In this initial stage, people are cautious and careful when disclosing information (Taylor & Altman, 1987). People put forth effort to avoid conflict or potentially polarizing topics such as political views during this stage. They also withhold negative information until later in the relationship. In this stage people reveal bits of themselves at the public level and act in socially desirable and polite ways.

The second step in social penetration theory is an exploratory emotional exchange in which people share details that they are less afraid of self-disclosure beyond the most superficial information. Although the breadth of topics discussed may increase, these topics are still generally revealing of the public self (Taylor & Altman, 1987). It is at this stage that personality begins to form. At this stage, people share information that they can tell random acquaintances or friends.

The third stage of social penetration theory is emotional exchange, in which more middle-class information is shared and interactions become increasingly random (Taylor & Altman, 1987). This is where people are likely to disclose information about themselves or more intimate information. Disclosure at this stage is casual and spontaneous, and this stage reflects an ongoing commitment and level of comfort. The stage of emotional exchange may also include the beginning of a conflict. At this stage, people can share information with close friends and lovers.

The last step in the theory of social penetration is a stable exchange characterized by openness, breadth and depth of conversation (Taylor & Altman, 1987). At this stage, the most intimate information about a person's self is continuously revealed. This stage is characterized by honesty and closeness, a high degree of spontaneity, and open expression of thoughts, feelings, and actions. During this stage, people rarely maintain relationships, usually romantic relationships, close family members, and close friends.

Reduced self-disclosure due to interpersonal conflict and relational stressors can lead to social de-intervention, de-escalation, or dissolution (Taylor & Altman, 1987). Social depenetration is the deliberate closing of certain parts of a person's life to their partner. This breakup process can signal a breakup in a relationship or a reexamination of a relationship. This relationship shrinking process can be gradual or more abrupt, such as following the

breakdown of the relationship that triggered the breakup. Friends or romantic partners may drift away or go through a definite change/severance in their relationship, and their interactions will depend on their path.

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theories propose that individuals take a practical approach to personal relationships. Guided by self-interest, individuals regularly ascertain the value of staying in the relationship compared to leaving it (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Specifically, they contrast the rewards they receive from the relationship (e.g., companionship, affection, shared financial burden) with the costs they incur (e.g., time, shared goods and conflict)

In the process of interaction and relational development, relational currencies are exchanged. These may be economic or tangible, or social or intangible. Foa and Foa (1974) elaborated resource theory, which suggested that people are attracted to those who can provide desired resources. They identified six types of resources (love, status, information, money, goods, and services) that vary on two dimensions: particularism (i.e., the degree to which a resource's value is tied to the person who is providing it) and concreteness (i.e., the degree to which the resource can be clearly identified and tracked in the process of exchange).

Social exchange theories state that individuals use the rule of distributive justice in evaluating their resources to determine whether they will further escalate or maintain a developing relationship. This analysis is not limited to assess the of costs and benefits at that point in time; rather, it considers relational history as well as future likelihood. If the rewards are not proportional to the costs, an individual may feel under benefited and leave the relationship. When partners strike a balance of perceived rewards and costs, they experience relational equity, which often leads to greater satisfaction and intentions to continue the relationship. Equity theory suggests that those in relationships try to keep their cost-benefit

ratio the same as their partner's cost-benefit ratio. Resources exchanged within the relationship may be very dissimilar to each other, yet equity may still be established.

Thibaut and Kelley (1959) proposed interdependence theory, suggesting that the individual uses social cues to make two types of comparisons when evaluating the rewards and costs of being in a relationship. The comparison level is an assessment of one's satisfaction compared to one's expectations, often shaped by previous experience or observations of similar dyads. The comparison level for alternatives is an assessment of the desirability of one's alternatives compared to staying in the current relationship. If the alternatives meet a threshold, the individual will leave the original relationship to pursue an alternative. Thibaut and Kelley also described the process of relationship development from an exchange perspective. Initially, individuals engage in low-cost exchanges to assess the viability of the relationship. Although these interactions are often problematic because communication is guided by stereotypes and inaccurate expectations, they give individuals a chance to develop attraction and a sense of future exchanges. After these initial exchanges, there are four steps of relationship development. First, the individual must determine that the relationship will be rewarding and that the partner will provide mutual benefits. Second, the individual must assure the partner that he or she has similar goals and is willing to provide mutual benefits. Third, partners commit themselves to the relationship, perhaps publicly, and mutually agree to broaden their exchanges. Finally, partners achieve a level of certainty that future exchanges will continue.

Based on assumptions about social exchange, Levinger (1974) developed a model that differs depending on the level of the partner's relationship. At level 0, partners are unaware of each other's existence. At the first level, partners do not interact, but know each other. At the second level, surface contact occurs. As in many other models, interactions at this stage are relatively shallow and governed by social norms. If your partner is satisfied with this level of communication and they are in love or feel similar to each other, you can move up to the next

level. The third level is characterized by mutual self-disclosure and increased depth of relationship.

Relational Dialectic Theory

According to this perspective, reality is a dynamic process of motion and change driven by the interplay of opposing forces of unity (centripetal) and forces of difference (centrifugal; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Relationships involve two partners attempting to balance the effects of forces acting to simultaneously bring them together and pull them apart. These forces manifest themselves in specific areas of tension known as dialectics, which are uniquely experienced in every relationship. Furthermore, dialectical tensions are interrelated and continuously in flux. It is worth noting that in 2011, Baxter made significant reformulations to the theory such that she referred to it as "relational dialectics theory 2.0."

Research has consistently identified three main dialectics: integration-separation, stability-change, and expression-secrecy. Dialectics occurs both internally (within social units) and externally (between couples and larger social systems). The poles of the different dialectic represent seemingly contradictory but equally important needs that individuals and couples have.

Integration-separation (i.e., autonomy-connection) captures the basic tension between interdependence and individuation. According to relational dialectics theory, individuals must retain some of their autonomy within the couple while also maintaining connection to their partner. Thus, in the process of relationship development, partners seek unity as a couple but also need to maintain a sense of self. The couple must integrate itself with the greater social network, but also maintain the couple as a separate unit.

Stability-change (i.e., predictability-novelty) refers to the fundamental opposition between continuity and discontinuity. In scholarship on dialectics, stability and change are

often discussed in terms of uncertainty. In relational development, partners may want to achieve stability through disclosure and reducing any unwanted uncertainty about each other. On the other hand, developing relationships require change as partners' emotional closeness develops. Some novelty is also required to keep the relationship from seeming stagnant.

Finally, expression-privacy (i.e., openness-closedness) captures the tension between what is shared and what is not. In the process of relational development, partners must disclose enough to foster intimacy and trust, but also be cautious not to reveal too much too quickly. Also, partners may have topics that they wish to remain private. Thus, acceptable levels of expression must be negotiated as the relationship progresses.

Couples deal with stress through communication known as praxis patterns. Praxis patterns vary widely in functionality and the degree to which they facilitate positive communication in a relationship. Some praxis patterns include denial (i.e., ignoring one pole of the dialectical tension) and balance (i.e., partially addressing each pole without completely fulfilling either).

Knapp's Relational Stage Model

Knapp's (1978) dual staircase model describes how communication processes cause relationships to grow, stabilize, and then deteriorate over time. The model assumes relationships escalate in five distinct stages: initiating, experimenting, intensifying, integrating, and bonding. The unique events that distinguish each stage in the development process enable researchers to categorize them. The first exchange of words between two people is referred to as initiating. Making a first impression happens immediately after meeting someone. Introductions and superficial subjects predominate in the first few conversations; initiating is frequently determined by social norms and standards for greeting someone. The following stage is experimentation, during which couples look for further details to evaluate if a potential

love partner might be a suitable fit. Usually, if there are any passionate embers, this stage comes right after the initiating stage. To eliminate ambiguity, experimenting may entail asking the target direct or indirect questions or enlisting the help of a mutual acquaintance. Experimenting might also involve the use of tests within the relationship to evaluate the interest or commitment level of the target. Knapp's (1978) dual staircase model describes how communication processes cause relationships to grow, stabilise, and then deteriorate over time. The model assumes relationships escalate in five distinct stages: initiating, experimenting, intensifying, integrating, and bonding. The unique events that distinguish each stage in the development process enable researchers to categorise them. The first exchange of words between two people is referred to as initiating. Making a first impression happens immediately after meeting someone. Introductions and superficial subjects predominate in the first few conversations; initiating is frequently determined by social norms and standards for greeting someone. The following stage is experimentation, during which couples look for further details to evaluate if a potential love partner might be a suitable fit. Usually, if there are any passionate embers, this stage comes right after the initiating stage. To eliminate ambiguity, experimenting may entail asking the target direct or indirect questions or enlisting the help of a mutual acquaintance. Experimenting might also involve the use of tests within the relationship to evaluate the interest or commitment level of the target. In the early phases of relationships, people must filter information about a potential romantic partner, therefore information is obtained and weighed.

When the relationship stops being so planned, the escalation process moves on to intensifying. Self-disclosure among romantic partners rises, and relationship commitment starts to show. Couples develop a sense of shared, public relational identity during theintegrating period. Couples are more inclined to prioritise dyadic connection than to rely on social rules to guide their relationships. Couples commonly use the pronouns "we" and "us" atthis point to assume an interdependent relational identity Finally, partners make their

relationship known to others, which is frequently accomplished during the formal, occasionally legal bonding stage of Knapp's model. Knapp also proposes five stages of decline that can occur.

Hyper-Personal Model

Increasingly, relationship development occurs via technologically-mediated communication. Walther's (1996) hyper-personal model was developed to explain how computer-mediated communication (CMC) may yield different outcomes than face-to-face communication in impression formation and relationship development.

The hyper-personal model has four components: senders who selectively self-present; receivers who overattribute similarity to the sender; an asynchronous channel; and a feedback loop that may result in behavioral confirmation. In technologically-mediated communication, senders have the ability to control or selectively present themselves and are more conscious of how information is being presented. Given the sender's crafted self-presentation, the receiver then perceives the sender in an idealized manner. The asynchronous channel centers on the medium used by the sender and receiver; given the time lag in asynchronous exchanges, users can manipulate the flow of disclosure. Finally, when the receiver provides feedback, he or she may reinforce the sender's modified self-presentation. The hyper-personal model would suggest that due to these processes, CMC yields different perceptions and expectations for the relational partner than what would have developed had they interacted face-to-face.

Empirical review

To better understand fear of intimacy and virtual intimacy among college students as well as the relationship between the respective variables among them, it was required to review the existing literature. The empirical review entails a comprehensive report of other researchers' works related to the present study.

Fear of intimacy among college students

In 1991 Descutner and Thelen defined fear of intimacy as "the inhibited Capacity of an individual, because of anxiety to exchange thoughts and feelings of Personal significance with another individual who is highly valued" (p. 219) and developed The Fear of Intimacy Scale (FIS) as a way of measuring this concept. Results from this study showed that for a sample of college psychology students (N = 129, mean age 19.21 years) a higher fear of intimacy was linked to various aspects of self-report data which included considering themselves less easy to get to know, lower satisfaction with the quality of their dating relationship, less satisfaction with expectations regarding long term relationships and having shorter relationships. Higher FIS scores were present for those participants who considered themselves not in an exclusive relationship in comparison to those dating someone exclusively.

Sherman and Thelen (1996) tested FIS on a population of adult students (average age 19 years) using a dating version and a friendship version. Results indicated that females reported a higher fear of intimacy for dating Relationships compared to friendships, whereas the opposite was true for males (total Mean score = 84.63, SD = 19.42). Those participants who had a dating partner were found to have a lower fear of intimacy than those who were not dating. Furthermore, those participants who indicated having had at least one dating relationship had a lower fear of intimacy than those who had never had an exclusive dating relationship. No correlation was found between the number of people a participant had dated for at least 2 months and a fear of intimacy in dating relationships. The authors hypothesized that the quality of prior relationships and expected relationships may have a greater impact on fear of intimacy than the number of relationships.

Bumby and Hansen (1997) conducted a study of 20 male psychology college students (mean age 28.2 years) as a control group for a forensic investigation of child molesters, rapists,

and non-sex offenders (n = 71). Child molesters had a significantly higher fear of intimacy (average score of 108.8) than the other groups, including the control group (average score of 72.4) (Bumby & Hansen, 1997).

Thelen et al. (2000), claim that those relationship partners (male and female students of psychology, with mean ages of 19.77 and 19.41 years, respectively) who scored higher on the FIS's measure of fear of intimacy suggested that they craved and had a lower level of intimacy in their present partner relationship. The findings indicated that FIS ratings within couples were associated, indicating that the partners shared an identical fear of intimacy. The degree of intimacy fear also appeared to have an impact on how long partnerships lasted. Female participants who indicated that they had a high fear of intimacy were less likely to be in their relationship at the sixth month follow-up. These women also had higher rates of fear of intimacy than women who had been in a relationship for six months or longer. Overall, males had higher FIS scores than females (M = 70.77 vs. M = 65.51).

F., Terrell et al (2000) conducted a study of fears of loneliness and intimacy among adolescents who were taught as children not to trust strangers. Eighty college students and their parents completed the modified UCLA Loneliness Scale, two versions of the Fear of intimacy scale (FIS-D and FIS-F), and a basic questionnaire. Students who were taught as children not to trust strangers were more afraid of intimacy, the study found. Additionally, women who were taught not to trust strangers experienced more loneliness than men, as did women and men who were taught not to trust strangers.

Ahmed Kamal Abdel et al., (2008) conducted a study on Fear of intimacy as a mediator between anxiety and friendship in a sample of university students. The purpose of the study was to examine the psychometric properties of fear of intimacy, anxiousness, and friendship among students at universities as well as the validity of the hypothesis that fear of intimacy

serves as the mediator between anxiety and friendships among the study participants. 400 students of both sexes (146 men and 254 women) from rural (n = 202) and urban (n = 198) schools made up the study sample. Their ages ranged from 18 to 25 years, with an average age of 20.50 years and a standard deviation of 1.47 years. The findings demonstrated the study tools' strong psychometric qualities. The results showed that the research tool has excellent psychological properties. As a result, it was found that fear and anxiety of intimacy indirectly affect friendship, and fear of intimacy and fear of intimacy indirectly affect friendship.

Fear of intimacy has also been studied in people with chronic health problems. College students with asthma (n = 52, mean age 20.13) and those without any reported history of a chronic illness (n = 52, mean age 20.23) were investigated regarding their dating anxiety and fear of intimacy (Eddington et al., 2010). No difference was found between the two groups on these measures (no fear of intimacy mean scores were provided for the sample). However, in the control group, fear of intimacy was found to be a significant predictor of mental health related quality of life, with the authors suggesting that a fear of intimacy may play a part in a lower quality of life.

Crystal Armstrong (2014) examined closeness with fathers and fear of intimacy among college women. The study consisted of 101 women enrolled in a University in the South. It was hypothesized that women who reported relatively close relationships with their fathers during adolescence would indicate less fear of intimacy. Second, it was hypothesized that women who spent more time with their fathers as adolescents would report less fear of intimacy. Third, it was hypothesized that women Who said that they spent more time with their fathers would report increasing ease with Self-disclosure. As expected, Pearson's correlations recorded significant negative associations between closeness with father and fear of intimacy, and between time spent with father and fear of intimacy. Pearson correlations documented a

significant positive relationship between time spent and self-disclosure. Father-daughter relationship is an important correlate of fear of intimacy among college women.

Byung Su Kim (2014) investigated the effect of family-of-origin function on fear of intimacy: the mediating effect of adult attachment. Data were collected through a survey of 557 college students located in Jeollabuk-do, South Korea. The collected data were analyzed using basic descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, and multiple regression analysis. It was verified using the method of Baron and Kenny, and the Sobel test was performed to determine the significance of the surrogate model. Results show that family functioning is negatively associated with fear of intimacy. Younger students and those with less dating experience were more likely to fear intimacy. Fear of intimacy was influenced by the family of origin through an intermediate effect between attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety. Attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety partially mediated the relationship between family-of-origin function and fear of intimacy. In other words, it was found that the function of the family of origin not only directly affects the fear of intimacy, but also has an indirect effect through attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety.

Yun JI and colleagues (2015) carried out a study on the mediating effect of inferiority complex in the relationship between childhood trauma and fear of intimacy in college students. A total of 420 undergraduate students (72 boys and 324 girls aged 18-24 years) from Lang-fang Normal School were evaluated using the Inappropriate Sentiment Scale (FIS), Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ), and Fear of Intimacy Scale (FIS). I did. Regression and bootstrapping were used to test the mediating effect of feelings of inferiority on the association between childhood trauma and fear of intimacy. These results suggest that inferiority complex can play a mediating role between college students' childhood trauma and fear of intimacy.

Theodoros and colleagues, 2022 investigated the impact of rejection sensitivity on fear of intimacy during adolescence. The sample consisted of 679 universities (280 males and 399 females). Students. Data were collected using self-report questionnaires measuring sensitivity to rejection, fear of intimacy, interpersonal anxiety, and memory for parental acceptance. The results showed that sensitivity to rejection clearly influences the development of fear of intimacy through increased interpersonal anxiety, particularly in women.

Randa Abdullah Abdel et., al (2023) conducted a study on Fear of intimacy in the light of some demographic variables among university students. sample consisted of (446) male and Female Students, an exploratory sample, and (413) male and female students, a basic sample the research sample consisted of (413) male and female students from the third and fourth years at the Faculty of Education, Fayoum University. The researchers used several statistical methods to verify the validity of the hypotheses. Results shows that there were statistically significant differences in the fear of intimacy among university students, which is attributed to the gender (male / female) in Favor of female students. There were also statistically significant differences in the fear of intimacy among university students, which is attributed to their marital status (married/ engaged/ single) in Favor of single students.

Virtual intimacy among college students

Stacy E Thayer & Sukanya Ray (2006) studied online communication preferences according to age, gender, and duration of Internet use. Results showed no fundamental effect on gender, preference for online communication and relationship building. Younger people were found to have a higher preference for online communication with friends and strangers compared to middle-aged and late-aged groups. High internet users scored higher on online communication and relationship building.

Reza Shabahang and coworkers carried out a study titled "Online Friend Preferences for Personal Friends: The Effect of Interpersonal Fear on Online Relationship Preferences." People in online environments spend as much time and effort developing and maintaining relationships as they do in other meeting places. In some cases, people prefer to make friends over the Internet rather than through traditional means of relationship formation. The current study examines the preference of online friends over face-to-face friends. Initially, they developed a short univariate 11-item questionnaire to assess online friendship preferences based on semi-structured interviews. Participants who reported higher concerns about intimacy and vulnerability in their relationships reported preferring online friends. A preference for online friends is associated with an increased risk of problematic Internet use. Studies have shown that fear of interpersonal relationships, combined with the nature of online communication, leads some people to spend more time online, preferring online intimacy to face-to-face friendships.

In 2011, Zarqa Ali explored Pakistani male and female students' perceptions on the impact of the internet on relationships. The results of the study revealed that the Internet has brought family members closer to each other, enhancing the unity among them and strengthening the family ties which have increased the sense of responsibility among youth. The perception of males and females was not significantly different. However, the perception of users and non-users of the Internet was different. The non-users disagreed that the Internet had a role in changing relationships, while users indicated their agreement on its role in bringing change to youngsters' relationships.

Anna Bujala (2012) Conducted A Study on Gender Differences in Internet Usage. The results indicate gender differences both in the intensity of Internet usage and the ways in which it is used. Women spend less time online, have shorter experience online, and express less openness towards online relationships or services. Men are far more likely than women to

engage in activities like playing games, listening to music or the radio, viewing films, or seeking for hilarious content. This is the biggest gender difference in the types of activities carried out online.

Gloria, Hong – Yee Chan & T Wing Lo (2014) conducted a study to find out online friendship and virtual intimacy in the context of hidden youth in Hong Kong. The score of 357 hidden youth participants analyzed using t- test. Result of the study show that the friendship quality of offline relationship is generally slightly higher than that of online relationships, while online friendship displays a higher intimacy level than offline.

Ruogu Kang and colleagues (2016) conducted a study on Strangers on Your Phone: Why People Use Anonymous Communication Applications. Participants in the study reported ages between 19 and 29 (mean age 23.5 years); 11 were female participants and 7 Were male participants. They conducted eighteen semi-structured interviews. Result of the study shows that participants interacted on anonymous communication apps to disclose predominantly personal information or emotions, and that they felt short-lived connections with other users in response to content or aspects of content they could relate to. Majority of the participants visited the app for five to fifteen minutes a day. They reported browsing and liking posts beforethey went to bed, or to pass time when they had some downtime throughout the day, some participants in our sample reported their usage of the apps declined over time.

Chin-Siang-Ang (2017) explores Internet Habit Strength and Online Communication: Exploring Gender Differences. Findings found that internet habit strength was positively associated with online communication, but that this association was stronger for females than it was for males. This implies that females were more likely than males to engage in online conversation if their internet habit was greater. The results show that gender does affect online communication decisions because it changes the strength of online habit.

Conclusion

The empirical studies reviewed here accounted for the understanding of the variables: fear of intimacy and virtual intimacy. Some pertinent pieces of evidence from the reviews convey that fear of intimacy often causes chronic health conditions. Some studies identified that males have more fear of intimacy than women (Thelen et al., 2000). Fear of intimacy was influenced by the family of origin through an intermediate effect between attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety. Attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety partially mediated the relationship between family-of-origin function and fear of intimacy. Certain studies on virtual intimacy shows that men engage much more often in activities such as playing games, listening to music or the radio, watching films, or looking for humorous contentthan women do and online friendship displays a higher intimacy level than offline. However, the studies related to these variables among college students are limited and the majority of the studies have conducted in Western countries. Therefore, it is found reasonable to study the association between these variables in Kerala population.

Furthermore, the focus of the study was on the salutary effects of fear of intimacy and virtual intimacy. The studies examining the role of the association of fear of intimacy and virtual intimacy are scarce. The present study examines the relationship between these two variables based on gender, course of study and the type of college. It is essential to understand how fear of intimacy affect the formation of new relationship or maintaining the existing relationship. By studying this association helps the researchers and therapist to develop more interventions to solve this fear related relationship issues. This study intends to bridge the gap in the literature by advancing the understanding of the explicit connections between fear of intimacy and virtual intimacy. Further investigation and academic research are needed because only a limited number of studies have unequivocally examined fear of intimacy and virtual intimacy and their effect on college students.

CHAPTER III
METHOD

Research methodology involves analyzing procedural steps applied to the field of study in a systematic and theoretical manner. An essential part is that it involves describing, explaining, and predicting phenomena in order to solve a problem. The research methodology comprises aspects such as research designs, target population, sample size and sampling procedure, data collection instruments and data analysis procedure. Rather than offering solutions, methodologies provide the theoretical basis for understanding which procedure, or set of procedures, can be applied to a particular case (Kothari, 2004).

Research design

According to Kothari (2004), "a research design is a plan, a roadmap and a blueprint strategy of investigation conceived so as to obtain answers to research questions, it is the heart of any study". Accordingly, considering the purpose of this study descriptive research design was found appropriate for meeting the objectives. The survey method using questionnaires was adopted for collecting data regarding the variables of the study. Calderon & Gonzales (2018), define descriptive research as "a purposive process of gathering, analyzing, classifying, and tabulating data about prevailing conditions, practices, processes, trends, and cause-effect relationships and then making an adequate and accurate interpretation of such data with or without or sometimes minimal aid of statistical methods".

Participants

A total sample of 153 college students was collected by using the conveniencesampling Method. The sample consists of 49 male and 304 female participants. In therespective sample, the age of students ranged from 18 to 26 years. The sample consisted of participants belonging to various engineering, arts and science colleges in the

Thiruvananthapuram. Data was collected from S. N. College Chempazhanthy, M.G college, Loyola College of Social Sciences, Government Polytechnic College Attingal, Attingal Govt College, & University college.

Tools used for data collection

Variables: The variables in the current study are fear of intimacy and virtual intimacy.

The following scale was used to measure Fear of intimacy;

Fear-of-Intimacy Scale (FIS, Carol J. Descutner and Thelen, 1991)

The FIS is a 35-item instrument designed to measure fear of intimacy, defined as the inhibited capacity of an individual, because of anxiety, to exchange thoughts and feelings of personal significance with another individual who is highly valued. The FIS is based on the idea that intimacy exists only with the communication of personal information about which one has strong feelings and with high regard for the intimate other. The FIS is viewed as useful for research on this topic as well as for evaluating treatment outcomes when problems with intimacy are the focus.

Reliability

The FIS has excellent internal consistency, with an alpha of .93. The FIS also has excellent stability, with a one-month test-retest correlation of .89.

Validity

The FIS has good construct validity in comparison with a number of measures with which it should and should not be correlated. These included positive correlations with the UCLA Loneliness Scale and negative correlations with the Jourard Self-Disclosure Questionnaire, Miller Social Intimacy Scale and Need for Cognition, as well as several items of self-report data on relationships. The FIS is correlated significantly with social desirability.

Scoring

The FIS is easily scored by summing individual item responses for a total score. The scale consists of two parts. part A and part B. In part A respondents are asked to indicate how they rate their characteristics in a close dating relationship from 1- (Not at all characteristic of me) to 5 – (Extremely characteristic of me). In Part B respondents are asked to rate their past relationships characteristics on a scale of 1 to 5. Items 3, 6-8, 10, 14, 17-19, 21, 22, 25, 27, 29, and 30 are Reverse-scored.

Virtual Intimacy Scale

Virtual intimacy scale was developed by the researcher in 2023 in which is a basic tool to understand virtual intimacy among college students. It is a self-report measure. The scale contains 10 items.

Reliability

The reliability of virtual Intimacy scale is 0.748.

Validity

The scale has phase validity.

Scoring

The scale consists of 10 items. Score of 5 was given to strongly agree, 4 for agree, 3 for neutral, 2 for disagree and 1 for strongly disagree.

Personal Data Sheet

To collect the sociodemographic details of the participants a personal data sheet was provided which included the variables such as name, gender, stream of study, college, year of study.

Informed Consent Form

An informed consent form which includes the terms of confidentiality and the purpose of the study was given to the participants to ensure their voluntary participation in the study.

Procedure for Data Collection

For the purpose of data collection, responses were collected from college students by providing questionnaires by sharing google forms. Consent from participants was taken. Individual voluntary participation was ensured. The consent form and the personal data sheet used for data collection have been enclosed in the appendix. Participants were informed about all the required details for filling up questionnaires and were asked to carefully read the instructions given in the questionnaires. The participants were also requested to give honest responses and to give responses to every item of the questionnaires. 10-20 minutes were given for completing the questionnaire. After data collection, scoring was done and subjected to statistical analysis.

Statistical Techniques used for Data Analysis

The following were the statistical techniques used for analyzing the data. Statistical analysis for the data was done using the SPSS-22 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) Version. Different statistical techniques like Test of normality, t-test and correlation were used.

Normality Test

A normality test is a test of whether a data set is distributed in a way consistent with a normal distribution. Usually this is a test of the null hypothesis that the data are from a normal population, particularly a good test. Thus, by rejecting the null hypothesis, we can conclude with certainty that the data set is not normally distributed, but if the null hypothesis is not

rejected, we can say that the data can be drawn from a normally distributed population. This study uses the Shapiro-Wilk test.

Frequency distribution and percentage

The number of instances of each response chosen by the respondents is shown by a descriptive statistical method. Frequency distribution arrangement of statistical data that exhibits the frequency of the occurrence of the values of a variable. Percent simply means 'per hundred', and the symbol used to express percentage is %.

t-test

A parametric statistical comparison of the means of two groups is done using the student's t-test. It is often used in hypothesis testing to determine whether a process or treatment actually affects a population of interest, or whether two groups are different. The student t- test is based on the t-distribution and is considered a suitable test for assessing the significance of a sample mean or the significance of a difference between two sample means.

Pearson product-moment correlation

Pearson Product and Moment Correlation Coefficient or Pearson Correlation Coefficient A measure of the strength of a linear relationship between two variables, denoted by r. Pearson's product-moment correlation attempts to draw a line of best fit between the data of two variables, and Pearson's correlation coefficient r indicates how far all data points are from that line of best fit.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present chapter deals with results and discussion. This study was conducted to discover the Fear of Intimacy and Virtual Intimacy among college students using fear of intimacy questionnaire and Virtual Intimacy questionnaire. The study was conducted among 153 participants (49 males and 104 Females) selected from different colleges in Thiruvananthapuram, using convenient sampling method. Data collection involved administering the Fear of Intimacy questionnaire and Virtual Intimacy questionnaire in the form of a google form. The scoring of Fear of Intimacy was done according to standardized manual. In case of virtual intimacy questionnaire, scoring was done according to the scoring patterns created by the author. Using SPSS version, the obtained data matrices were then subjected to appropriate statistical analysis. To summarize the data, descriptive statistics were first applied. The final internal consistency was calculated by analyzing all the items in the scale in terms of Cronbach's alpha. Later, the data matrix was subjected to statistical analysis including descriptive statistics, t-test and Pearson's Product Moment Correlation.

The study analyses fear of intimacy and virtual intimacy among college students. The obtained results for the variables of interest have been presented in the tables and the results are discussed with respect to objectives and hypothesis.

Fear of intimacy among college students

The results obtained for fear of intimacy among college students are discussed in the following tables.

Figure 4.1

Extent of Fear of Intimacy among college students

extent of fear of intimacy
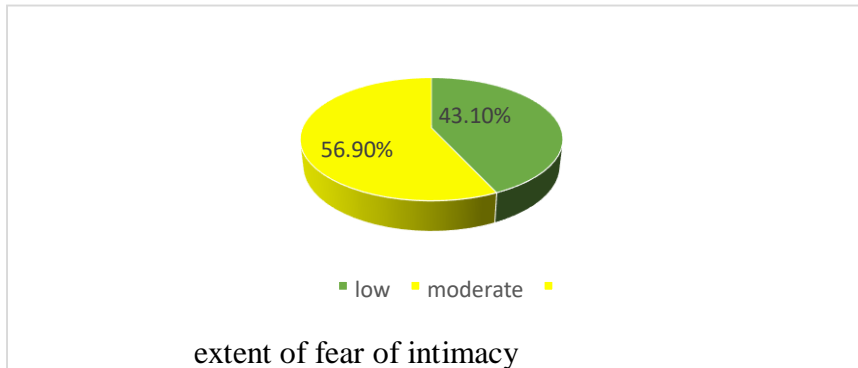
Figure 4.1 shows the extent of fear of intimacy among college students. It shows that Fear of Intimacy has a moderate effect on college students. Among the chosen sample (N = 153), 43.10% agreed that they have low fear of intimacy, 56.90% agreed that they have moderate level of fear of intimacy. From the above data, it is understood that 87 participants have moderate fear of intimacy. This can be due to various reasons such as their personality traits, low self-esteem, trust issues, history of unstable relationships and unable to share feelings or express emotion. If the participant has fear of intimacy, there is a high chance of developing withhold affection or put-up barriers to emotional or sexual affection.

In this study, about 25.5 % agrees that they are more comfortable in keeping very personal information to themselves. Which indicates that they are not ready to share their personal information with others. 17.6% strongly agree with this and 24.2% moderately agree with this statement. Among 153 no of sample around 47 strongly disagree with the statement "I would feel comfortable expressing my true feelings too" and 20 participants are agreed with the statement.

5.9% of the population strongly agree the statement "I would feel uncomfortable telling o about things in the past that I have felt ashamed of "and only 5.9% agreed and 15% moderately agreed and 32.7% slightly agreed with the statement. 32.7% strongly experience uneasiness in sharing the information that hurt them very much. 18.3% of the population experience difficulty in being open with the person whom they have a close relation with. About 17% population agreed that they are afraid to share their private thoughts.

While considering the previous relationship around 22.2%, 17.6%, 14.4%, 20.3% and 23.3% populations are agreed with the statements "I have shied away from opportunities to be else someone, held back feelings in previous relationships, people think they are afraid to get close to them, also they think that they are not an easy person to get to know and done things in previous relationships to keep them from developing closeness" respectively.

Table 4.1

Fear of intimacy among college students based on gender

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	S. D	t-value	Significance
	Male	49	86.98	17.50		
Fear of intimacy					1.41	.161
	Female	104	82.27	20.05		

Table 4.1 shows the scores for fear of intimacy among college students based on gender. The mean value for fear of intimacy among male college students (N-49) is 86.98 (S.D. = 17.50) and female college students (N-104) is 82.27 (S.D. =20.05). The obtained t-value is 1.41 and p-value is .161 (p>0.05). The t-value is non-significant at 0.05 level. Hence, the null hypothesis that states 'there is no significant difference in fear of intimacy among college students based on gender' is accepted.

The result of the present study correlates with the findings of a comparative study conducted by Amy Regina Anderson (1998) on 'a study of the relationship between fear of intimacy and gender'. 60 college students (Male -30, female-30) from St. Louis was considered as participants in the study. The results of the study revealed an insignificant difference in fear of intimacy between male and female students. The mean values are 73.7 & 73.1 respectively. The corresponding t-value is .1305 and p-value is. 8966. Therefore, the study provides shreds of evidence that there is no significant difference existed between male and female college students on their level of fear of intimacy.

The results of the present study contradict the findings of the study conducted by Thelen et al., (2000) found that those dating couples (male and female psychology students, mean age 19.77 years and 19.41 years respectively) who had higher fear of intimacy. From the results female participants who indicated that they had a high fear of intimacy. Over all FIS score for males (M-65.51) were less than for females (F-70.77).

On the basis of the results obtained from the present empirical investigation, it may be concluded that male and female college students did not differ significantly in their level of fear of intimacy. It may be due to their stage of development, which might minimize gender-based differences in fear of intimacy. However, females have slightly higher fear of intimacy than males.

Table 4.2

Fear of intimacy among college students based on course of study

Variables	Course	N	Mean	S. D	t-value	Significance
Fear of intimacy	Professional	97	85.66	18.62	1.59	.114
	Non-professional	56	80.52	20.28		

Table 4.2 elucidates the scores for fear of intimacy among college students based on course of study. The mean value for fear of intimacy for professional college students (N-97) is 85.66 (S.D. = 18.62) and mean of non-professional college students (N-56) is 80.52 (S.D. = 20.28). The obtained t-value is 1.59 and p-value is .114 (p>0.05). The t-value is non-significant at 0.05 level. Hence, the null hypothesis that 'there is no significant difference in fear of intimacy among college students based on course of study' is accepted.

Both professional and non-professional college students often face high expectations from themselves and others. Professional students are focused more on their career trajectories and may worry about establishing a professional image. But in non-professional students may feel pressure to excel academically and socially, impacting their ability to open up emotionally. Both groups often experience time constraints due to demanding schedules. These timepressure can limit opportunities for meaningful connections and intimacy. Due to the high

demanding nature of digital media both the groups rely heavily on online interactions and social media. It can also hinder genuine emotional connections, as it's easier to maintain superficial relationships online rather than engaging in deeper, face-to-face interactions. Professional and non-professional college students may fear rejection and judgement from their peers or colleagues. This fear can prevent them from expressing their true selves and forming close relationships, as they worry about being vulnerable and potentially facing criticism. Both groups may develop similar coping mechanisms to deal with their fear of intimacy. These could include avoiding emotional discussions, overworking, engaging in substance use, or seeking short-term, surface level connections to avoid getting too close to others. These are the major commonalities in professional and non-professional college students for developing fear of intimacy.

According to George Homans social exchange theory (1958) individuals assess the perceived costs and rewards associated with entering into relationships. Both professional and non-professional college students may evaluate the potential emotional risks and benefits of intimacy similarly. For instance, they might worry about vulnerability, potential rejection, or time constraints, which are relevant to both groups regardless of their academic pursuits. The theory emphasizes the idea of interdependence, where individuals rely on one another for various resources, including emotional support. Both the groups of students may recognize the importance of emotional connections for their overall well-being, leading to a shared motivation to overcome fear of intimacy. Social norms and expectations can influence behavior. In the context of college life, both groups are exposed to similar societal norms that encourage forming close relationships and connections. The expectation to engage in friendships, social activities, and networking can contribute to a comparable level of fear of intimacy.

Comparison level refers to the standards individual use to evaluate the outcome of their relationships. If both professional and non-professional college students have similar comparison level, they may experience similar levels of fear of intimacy since their expectations and evaluations of relationships are aligned. According to equity theory if both group students perceive that they are receiving similar levels of intimacy and emotional support, they may be more likely to have similar fear of intimacy levels, as the perceived balance is maintained. Both professional and non-professional students perceive similar alternatives, they may experience similar fear of intimacy, as the perceived benefits of forming close relationships outweigh the potential costs. Commitment to a relationship increases when individuals have invested time, effort, and resources into it. Both the groups may similarly invest in relationships on campus, leading to comparable levels of fear of intimacy due to the shared commitment.

On the basis of social exchange theory and other findings from researcher it may be concluded that rational assessment of costs, rewards, norms and interpersonal dynamics contributes to a common experience of intimacy-related fears among professional and non-professional college students, despite their diverse academic pursuits.

Table 4.3

Fear of intimacy among college students based on type of college

Variables	College	N	Mean	S.D	t-value	Significance
Fear of intimacy	Private	52	79.65	20.18		
					-1.908	.058
	Government	101	85.90	18.64		

Table 4.3 represents the scores for fear of intimacy among college students based on college. The mean value for fear of intimacy for private college students (N-52) is 79.65 (S.D. =20.18) and for government college students (N-101) is 85.90 (S.D. =18.64). the obtained t-value is -1.908 and p-value is .058 (p>0.05). The t-value is non-significant at 0.05 level. Hence, the null hypothesis 'there is no significance difference in fear of intimacy among college students based on type of college' is accepted.

Both private college students and government college students can experience fear of intimacy, which may stem from personal experiences, societal influences, or emotional factors. Factors such as cultural background, upbringing, and individual personality traits can contribute to the development of fear of intimacy in both groups. Both the groups of students can face cultural pressures that influence their attitudes towards intimacy. In some cultures, there might be conservative values that discourage open discussions about relationships and intimacy, leading to fear or discomfort in expressing emotional vulnerabilities. They often experience high levels of academic stress, which can impact their ability to form and maintain intimate relationships. The demands of coursework, exams, and assignments can leave little time for personal connections, leading to a fear of getting too close to someone and potentially compromising their academic performance. Both groups of students can harbor personal insecurities or past traumas that contribute to a fear of intimacy. These insecurities might arise from issues such as body image, self-esteem, or previous negative experiences in relationships. Some students may come from backgrounds where they haven't witnessed healthy and intimate relationships, which can affect their ability to navigate and build such relationships themselves.

John Bowlby's attachment theory explores how early relationships with caregivers shapes an individual's emotional and interpersonal development. Theory identifies different attachment styles based on early caregiving experiences. These styles include secure, anxious, and avoidant attachments. Regardless of whether students attend private or government

colleges, their attachment styles can influence their fear of intimacy. If they had caregivers who were inconsistent in meeting their emotional needs, they might develop anxious or avoidant styles, leading to a fear of intimacy. The transition to college can be a significant life event that triggers attachment related emotions. Students from various backgrounds may struggle with leaving their support systems, leading to heightened fears of intimacy as they navigate new relationship. Both private and government college students face academic stressors that can impact their emotional availability in relationships. High academic demands may leads to an avoidance of intimacy to focus on studies, irrespective of college type. Students from different college backgrounds can still share similar relationship experiences that contribute to their fear of intimacy. Past romantic disappointments or challenges in forming close friendships can be relevant regardless of the type of college.

From the basis of attachment theory and researcher's findings it revealed that fear of intimacy is multi-dimensional and not strictly dependent on the type of college attended. Both the students from private college and government college experiences some degree of fear of intimacy.

Figure 4.2

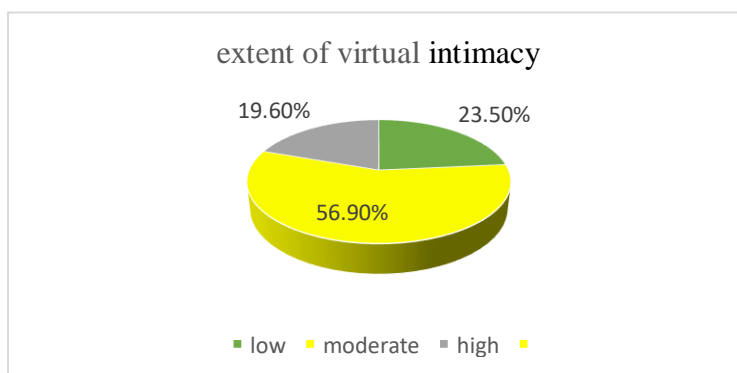*Extend of Virtual Intimacy among college students*

Figure 4.2 shows the extent of virtual intimacy among college students. Among the chosen sample (N=153), 23.50% agreed that they have low virtual intimacy and 56.90% of the sample believed that they have moderate level of virtual intimacy. 19.60% agree that they have high level of characteristics of virtual intimacy. From the above data, it is understood that 87 participants moderately feel virtual intimacy. This can be due to the personality trait, acceptance and appreciation of other peoples, and the sense of being with someone else.

Around 55% population agreed that they are able to maintain a healthy boundary to navigate the challenges and complexities of virtual interactions. 15% individuals are not able to maintain this boundary. 13% strongly agree that virtual intimacy can be a meaningful form of intimacy, even without physical contact. 32% agreed with the statement 28% have neutral response to this statement. 21% agreed that they are effectively communicate their needs and expectations through virtual intimacy experiences. 43% reported neutral response to this statement. 16 % believes that virtual intimacy plays an important role in maintaining relationship. 11% of the population is strongly disagreed with the statement and 16% agreed with it and 32% have neutral response and 23% have agreed with this.

From the results, it is clear that virtual interaction has an important role in their life. It helps them to develop healthy relationship with others.

Table 4.4

Virtual intimacy among college students based on gender

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	S.D	t-value	Significance
Virtual intimacy	Male	49	31.31	10.1		
					2.17	.031
	Female	104	27.96	8.25		

Table 4.4 demonstrates the scores for virtual intimacy among college students based on gender. The mean value of virtual intimacy among male college students (N-49) is 31.31 (S.D. = 10.1) and female college students (N-104) is 27.96 (S.D. = 8.25). The obtained t-value is 2.17 and p-value is .031(p<0.05). The t-value is significant at 0.05 level. Hence, the null hypothesis that 'there is no significant difference in virtual intimacy among college students based on gender is rejected'.

The result of the present study correlates the findings of the study 'gender and the internet' by Hiroshi Ono and Madeline Zavodny (2002). The findings suggest that women were significantly less likely than men to use the internet.

Another study replicating similar findings was conducted by Anna Bujala (2012) on 'gender differences in internet usage'. Results specify that women spend less time on online, have shorter experience online, and express less openness towards online relationships. Men engage much more often in activities such as playing games, listening to music or the radio, watching films, or looking for humorous content than women do.

The results of present study contradict the findings of the studies conducted by Zarqa S. Ali (2011) on 'impact of internet on relationship; perception of male and female students of

Pakistan'. The t-value is .298 which indicates that male and female students' perception had no significant difference about the role of the internet in bringing change in relationships with opposite sex, family members and anonymous people are similar. Another study by Goulb et al (2007) study shows that there is no significant difference between men and women as far as their online relationships are concerned. Both male and female respondents were more willing to initiate friendship with opposite sex. Another study 'online communication preferences across age, gender, and duration of internet use' by Stacy & Sukanya (2006) indicated that no significant main effect for gender and online communication and relationship building preferences. Study by Chin-Sang Ang (2017). He conducted a study on internet habit strength and online communication; exploring gender differences. The findings of the study shows that internet habit strength was positively associated with online communication, but that this association was stronger for females than males. Females with stronger internet habit strength were more likely to engage in online communication than males.

On the basis of the results obtained from present empirical investigation, it may be concluded that male college students have higher virtual intimacy. It may be due to they are become more comfortable in virtual settings and these virtual interactions are provide an escape from traditional gender roles and expectations. Allow them to explore different aspects of their personalities and emotions that they might not feel comfortable expressing offline. However, females have higher virtual intimacy than men and also there is no gender difference in developing virtual intimacy. Further studies are conducted to this area to identify this gender difference in virtual intimacy.

Table 4.5

Virtual intimacy among college students based on course of study

Variables	Course	N	Mean	S.D	t-value	Significance
	Professional	97	29.49	9.10		
Virtual					.836	.405
intimacy	Non-professional	56	28.23	8.81		

Table 4.5 elucidates the scores of virtual intimacies among college students based on course of study. The mean value of virtual intimacy among professional college students (N-97) is 29.49 (S.D.=9.10) and for non-professional college students (N-56) is 28.23 (S.D. = 8.81). The obtained t-value is .836 and p-value .405 (p>0.05). The obtained t-value is non-significant at 0.05 level. Hence, the null hypothesis that 'there is no significant difference in virtual intimacy among college students based on course of study is accepted'.

Professional and non-professional college students are likely to be equally proficient in using technology and online platforms for communication. These platforms connect them with friends, family, and peers. The frequency and depth of online communication may not significantly differ between the two groups. Both professional and non-professional college students use online communication channels to share personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences, thereby fostering virtual intimacy regardless of their academic pursuits. Younger generations, regardless of their academic focus, tend to be more comfortable and may place similar importance on maintaining virtual connections.

According to reduced cue theory by Sproull and Kiesler (1986) online interactions often rely heavily on text-based communication, such as instant messaging or email. In these contexts, the absence of nonverbal cues necessitates a greater reliance on written language to convey emotions and intensions. Both groups of students have likely adapted to this mode of communication, developing skills to express themselves effectively through text and emotions. Virtual relationships have become a normalized and accepted form of social interaction. Online friendships, collaborations, and even romantic relationships are increasingly common across all demographics. This normalization contributes to a shift in societal attitudes, where the absence of physical presence is no longer a significant barrier to forming intimate connections. Thus, the convergence in virtual intimacy between professional and non-professional college students could be attributed to a broader cultural acceptance of online relationships.

Hyper-personal model by Walther (1995,1996) explains how online interactions can sometimes lead to an even greater sense of intimacy and connection compared to face-to-face communication. Both professional and non-professional college students may engage in their online interactions. They have the opportunity to emphasize shared interests, positive qualities, and common goals while downplaying potential differences. This idealized presentation can create a sense of similarity and compatibility, contributing to the observed lack of significant difference in virtual intimacy between the two groups. In the absence of nonverbal cues, individuals from both groups may attribute positive qualities to each other, enhancing their perception of the sender's personality and intentions. This attribution process can lead to a heightened sense of intimacy, as individuals feel understood, appreciated, and connected to their online counterparts.

On the basis of reduced cue theory, hyper-personal model and researcher's findings it revealed that virtual intimacy is not strictly dependent on the course of study chosen by the

students. Both professional and non-professional college students experience virtual intimacy.

Table 4.6

Virtual intimacy among college students based on type of college

Variables	College	N	Mean	S.D	t-value	Significance
Virtual intimacy	Private	52	27.60	8.32		
					-1.423	.152
	Government	101	29.77	9.27		

Table 4.6 represents the virtual intimacy among college students based on type college. The mean value of virtual intimacy among private college students (N-52) is 27.60 (S.D. = 8.32) and for government college students (N-101) is 29.77 (S.D. = 9.27). the obtained t-value is -1.423 and p-value is .152(p>0.05). Thus, the t-value is non-significant at 0.05 level. Hence, the null hypothesis that 'there is no significant difference in virtual intimacy among college students based on type of college is accepted'.

In today's digital age, access to technology and the internet has become widespread across various socioeconomic backgrounds. Both private and government college students likely have access to online platforms that facilitate virtual interactions. With the rise of online education, students from both private and government colleges may engage in similar online learning environments, fostering virtual interactions and intimacy. Individuals often compare themselves to their peers to assess their own behaviors and attitudes. If private and government college students observe their peers engaging in virtual intimacy, they may perceive it as socially accepted and be more likely to adopt similar behaviors.

According to Technology Acceptance Model by Fred Davis and Richard Bagozzi (Davis1989, Bagozzi & Warshaw 1992) proposed that user's perceptions of the usefulness and ease of use of technology influence their adoption and usage. If private and government college students may perceive virtual intimacy as useful for various reasons, such as maintaining social connections, engaging in group projects, or participating in online discussions. The nature of virtual intimacy, regardless of college type, could be seen as equally beneficial to achieving social and academic goals. When they find virtual platforms and tools easy to navigate and interact with, they might be more likely to develop virtual intimacy. Advances in technology and user-friendly interfaces could contribute to similar ease of use for both groups.

Social identity theory by Tajfel and his colleagues (Tajfel, 1978: Tajfel & Turner, 1979) suggests that individuals categorize themselves into different social groups, and these groups influence their behavior and interactions. In the context of virtual intimacy, students from private and government colleges might share a common identity as college students, leading to similar patterns of virtual interaction and intimacy.

On the basis of technology acceptance model, social identity theory, and researcher's findings it is concluded that virtual intimacy is same for both private and government college students. Technology access, cultural norms, personal preferences, and evolving online behaviors all contribute to shaping the dynamics of virtual interactions in these two groups.

Table 4.7

Relationship between Fear of Intimacy and Virtual Intimacy among college students

Variables	r	Sig
Fear of intimacy		
	.155	.056
Virtual intimacy		

Table 4.7 represents the relationship between fear of intimacy and virtual intimacy among college students. The correlation coefficient was found to be .155 and the value is not significant at the 0.05 level. This indicates that there is no significant relationship between fear of intimacy and virtual intimacy among college students. Hence, the null hypothesis which states there is no significant relationship between fear of intimacy and virtual intimacy among college students is accepted.

Virtual intimacy and fear of intimacy are two distinct concepts that do not have a direct relationship. Virtual intimacy refers to emotional closeness and connection experienced through digital platforms, often in the context of online relationships and communication (Couch et al., 2012). On the other hand, fear of intimacy, also known as intimacy avoidance or avoidant attachment, pertains to an individual's discomfort or reluctance to engage in close, emotionally vulnerable relationships (Fraley,2010). Virtual intimacy can provide a sense of connection and facilitate communication, it may not necessarily address the underlying factors contributing to fear of intimacy. Virtual interactions may create a perceived sense of intimacy without requiring individuals to confront deeper emotional issues that can arise face to face relationships (Couch et al., 2012). Studies have shown that some individuals who experience

fear of intimacy may use virtual interactions as a way to avoid the challenges and potential emotional risks of physical intimacy (Davidson & Moore, 2010).

In conclusion, virtual intimacy and fear of intimacy are distinct concepts, and while virtual interactions can provide a sense of connection, they may not directly address or resolve the underlying issues associated with fear of intimacy.

CHAPTER V
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The present chapter will summarize the findings and also provide the conclusion of the study. This chapter also includes the implications as well as the limitations of the study. The study aimed to examine fear of intimacy and virtual intimacy among college students.

The major objectives of the study were 1) to understand the extent of fear of intimacy among college students, 2) to understand the extent of virtual intimacy among college students, 3) to assess the fear of intimacy among college students based on gender, 4) to assess the virtual intimacy among college students based on gender, 5) to assess the fear of intimacy among college students based on course of study, 6) to assess the virtual intimacy among college students based on course of study, 7) to assess the fear of intimacy among college students based on type of college, 8) to assess the virtual intimacy among college students based on type of college, 9) to find out any relationship between fear of intimacy and virtual intimacy among college students.

The hypotheses of the study were, hypothesis 1 being that there that there is no significant difference in fear of intimacy among college students based on gender. Hypothesis 2 being there is no significant difference in fear of intimacy among college students based on course of study. Hypothesis 3 is that there is no significant difference in fear of intimacy among college students based on type of college. Hypothesis 4 being that there is no significant difference in virtual intimacy among college students based on gender. Hypothesis 5 is that there is no significant difference in virtual intimacy among college students based on course of study. Hypothesis 6 being that there is no significant difference in virtual intimacy among college students based on type of college. Hypothesis 7 is being that there is no significant relationship between fear of intimacy and virtual intimacy among college students.

The study sample consisted of 153 participants (49 males and 104 females). Participants were selected from different universities in Thiruvananthapuram District. Data was collected via Google Forms. Informed consent, Demographic data were collected from samples. For the present study, a descriptive study design was used. Data were collected using a fear scale for intimacy and a virtual intimacy scale. The obtained data was subjected to statistical analysis by using SPSS. Statistical analysis methods used in the study were normality test, t-test and correlation test. The results concluded that there was no significant association between fear of intimacy and virtual intimacy among college students.

5.1 Major findings and conclusions

Based on the results of the research following findings are made:

1. When assessing the fear of intimacy among college students, the majority of the sample agreed that they experience a moderate level of fear of intimacy.

2. 56.9 percent of the sample showed moderate level of virtual intimacy.

3. Even though the sample size of male was small compared to female, while examining the gender difference in fear of intimacy among college students based on gender, it was found that there is no significant difference male and female (p = .161 > 0.05).

4. No significant difference was observed in fear of intimacy among college students based on course of study (p = .114 > 0.05).

5. No significant difference was observed in fear of intimacy among college students based on type of college (p = .058 > 0,05).

6. The gender difference on virtual intimacy among college students, it was found thar there is a significant difference between males and females (p = .031 < 0.05).

7. No significant difference was observed in virtual intimacy among college students based on course of study (p = .405 > 0.05).

8. No significant difference was observed in virtual intimacy among college students based on type of college (p =.152 > 0.05).

9. There is no significant relationship observed between fear of intimacy and virtual intimacy among college students (p = .255 > 0.05).

5.2 Tenability of the hypotheses

On the basis of results obtained from the present study, the tenability of each hypothesis was formed for the study.

No	Hypothesis	Tenability
1.	There is no significant difference in fear of intimacy among college students based on gender.	Accepted
2.	There is no significant difference in fear of intimacy among college students based on course of study.	Accepted
3.	There is no significant difference in fear of intimacy among college students based on type of college.	Accepted
4.	There is no significant difference in virtual intimacy among college students based on gender.	Rejected
5.	There is no significant difference in virtual intimacy among college students based on course of study.	Accepted
6.	There is no significant difference in virtual intimacy among college students based on type of college.	Accepted
7.	There is no significant relationship between fear of intimacy and virtual intimacy among college students.	Accepted

5.3 Implications of the study

The findings of the study explore the reasons for fear of intimacy and the development of virtual intimacy among college students. The study also shows how this fear of intimacy affect the individual's development and the relationship formation. The results of the study shows that there is a difference in virtual intimacy based on gender, men are more prone to develop virtual intimacy than women. The results contradict many of the research findings such as women has higher virtual intimacy. From this study it is evident that fear of intimacy and virtual intimacy are in a moderate level for college students. Most of studies on fear of intimacy and virtual intimacy have been employed in normal population, adolescence and older people. There are few studies constructs on college students.

Within the context of counselling and psychotherapy, the findings that college students have moderate level of fear of intimacy. It may due to various reasons such as several phobias or fears like fear of rejection, fear of being exposed, fear of getting hurt or deceived. Early-life negative attitudes towards oneself and others are the basis of one's fear of intimacy. Fear of intimacy affect individual development. They avoid social interactions or isolate themselves to prevent getting close to others. This isolation leads to feeling of loneliness and contribute to a sense of detachment from the world around them. The fear of being vulnerable and exposed in a close relationship can lead to chronic worry and sadness. It may contribute low self-esteem and negative self-image. It hinders effective communication and problem-solving in relationships. Due to the negative effects of fear of intimacy on individual development a form of psychotherapy known as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is highly effective in treating attachment anxiety or fear of intimacy. Through this therapy, students learn to understand how their thought contribute their fear of maintaining relationships. Interpersonal skill trainings are provided to them for overcoming their relationship developing and maintaining problems. However, these interventions must also consider culture-specific and gender-related factors.

5.4 Limitations of the study

- Since the data were collected through Google form, the researcher couldn't directly involve in the data collection process.

- The study was based on a small sample of 153 participants. When compared to the entire general population the sample size was found relatively too small.

- The gender ratio was not proportional.

- The present study did not study the association of the constructs with other demographic variables (except gender, course of study and type of college). Potential covariances may have been seen between other demographic variables.

- The findings were based on self-reported data and may have been susceptible to response biases.

5.5 Suggestions for further research

- A mixed method research design would have been able to provide a lot more information. If participants were asked to explain their views on the topic, it could explain the findings better and would also help in finding information that could not be obtained quantitatively.

- Future research can incorporate other demographic variables.

- Longitudinal studies can be conducted.

- Further research should include proportions gender ratios and geographical locations.

- Future studies can replicate this study in other geographical areas. Cross-cultural studies would be beneficial to understanding the cultural influences on fear of intimacy and virtual intimacy.

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APPENDIX I

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Hello, I am Preetha. P, currently pursuing Masters in Counselling Psychology at Loyola college of Social Sciences. As part of my course-curriculum, I'm conducting a study on the topic "fear of intimacy and virtual intimacy among college students'. In this concern, your opinion is really valuable to proceed with my study. This study requires the completion of questionnaires, which will take roughly 10 to 15 minutes. You are requested to give your honest opinion. The information provided byyou will be kept completely confidential and will be used for research purposes only. I am in sincere hope that you will participate in this study and I greatly appreciate your help in assistingme with this research.

I give my voluntary consent to participate in this study.

Yes:

No:

PERSONAL DATA SHEET

Name

Gender: M/F/other

Course of study: Professional ☐   Non-professional ☐

Type of college: Government ☐   Private ☐

FEAR OF INTIMACY SCALE

Instructions

     Part A Instructions: Imagine you are in a close, dating relationship. Respond to the following statements as you would if you were in that close relationship. Rate how characteristic each statement is of you on a scale of 1 to 5 as described below, and put your responses on the answer sheet.

Note. In each statement "O" refers to the person who would be in the close relationship with you.

	Items	Not at all characteristic of me	Slightly characteristic of me	Moderately characteristic of me	Very characteristic of me	Extremely characteristic of me
1	I would feel comfortable telling O about things in the past that I have felt ashamed of.	1	2	3	4	5
2	I would feel uneasy talking with O about	1	2	3	4	5

	something that has hurt me deeply.					
3	I would feel comfortable expressing my true feelings to O.	1	2	3	4	5
4	If O were up-set I would sometimes be afraid of showing that I care	1	2	3	4	5
5	I might be afraid to confide my innermost feelings to O.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I would feel at ease telling O that I care about him/her.	1	2	3	4	5

7	I would feel at ease telling O that I care about him/her.	1	2	3	4	5
8	I would be comfortable discussing significant problems with O.	1	2	3	4	5
9	A part of me would be afraid to make a long-term commitment to O.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I would feel comfortable telling my experiences, even sad ones, to O.	1	2	3	4	5

1 1	I would probably feel nervous showing O strong feelings of affection	1	2	3	4	5
1 2	I would find it difficult being open with O about my personal thoughts.	1	2	3	4	5
1 3	I would feel uneasy with O depending on me for emotional support.	1	2	3	4	5
1 4	I would not be afraid to share with O what I dislike about myself.	1	2	3	4	5

1 5	I would be afraid to take the risk of being hurt in order to establish a closer relationship with O.	1	2	3	4	5
1 6	I would feel comfortable keeping very personal information to myself.	1	2	3	4	5
1 7	I would not be nervous about being spontaneous with O.	1	2	3	4	5
1 8	I would feel comfortable telling O things that I	1	2	3	4	5

	do not tell other people.				
1 9	I would feel comfortable trusting O with my deepest thoughts and feelings.	1	2	3	4	5
2 0	I would sometimes feel uneasy if O told me about very personal matters.	1	2	3	4	5
2 1	I would be comfortable revealing to O what I feel are my shortcomings and handicaps.	1	2	3	4	5

2 2	I would be comfortable with having a close emotional tie between us.	1	2	3	4	5
2 3	I would be afraid of sharing my private thoughts with O.	1	2	3	4	5
2 4	I would be afraid that I might not always feel close to O.	1	2	3	4	5
2 5	I would be comfortable telling O what my needs are.	1	2	3	4	5
2 6	I would be afraid that O would be more invested	1	2	3	4	5

	in the relationship than I would be.				
2 7	I would feel comfortable about having open and honest communicatio n with O.	1	2	3	4	5
2 8	I would sometimes feel uncomfortabl e listening to O's personal problems.	1	2	3	4	5
2 9	I would feel at ease to completely be myself around O.	1	2	3	4	5
3 0	I would feel relaxed being	1	2	3	4	5

	together and talking about our personal goals.					

Part B instructions: Respond to the following statements as they apply to your past relationships. Rate how characteristic each statement is of you on a scale of 1 to 5 as described in the instructions for part A.

31	I have shied away from opportunities to be close to someone.	1	2	3	4	5
32	I have held back my feelings in previous relationships.	1	2	3	4	5
33	There are people who think that I am afraid to get close to them.	1	2	3	4	5
34	There are people who think that I am not an easy person to get to know.	1	2	3	4	5
35	I have done things in previous relationships to keep me from developing closeness.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX IV

VIRTUAL INTIMACY QUESTIONNAIRES

Instructions

     Following are some items related to show your intimacy in virtual media. Please rate each statement from 1= Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree. Put a tick mark in any one of the 5 alternative responses. Please treat each item separately from every other item.

	Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	agree	Strongly agree
1	I feel comfortable expressing my sexual desires and boundaries in a virtual setting	1	2	3	4	5
2	I feel emotionally connected to my partner(s) during virtual intimacy experience	1	2	3	4	5
3	I feel satisfied with the level of intimacy in my virtual interactions.	1	2	3	4	5
4	I feel safe and respected during virtual intimacy interactions.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Virtual intimacy plays an important role in maintaining my relationships.	1	2	3	4	5

6	I am able to communicate my needs and expectations during virtual intimacy experiences.	1	2	3	4	5
7	Virtual intimacy enhances my sexual experiences and satisfaction.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Virtual intimacy has a positive impact on my overall well-being	1	2	3	4	5
9	I feel that virtual intimacy can be a meaningful form of intimacy, even without physical contact.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I am able to navigate the challenges and complexities of virtual intimacy interactions effectively, while maintaining boundaries.	1	2	3	4	5