Emotional intelligence accounts for variations in emotion-related skills. Researchers have suggested that, at least, some of these skills can be developed with practice. Research also shows that individual differences in emotion predict emotional intelligence. Based on these findings, we propose an individual difference model for developing emotional intelligence. This model proposes that attention to emotion facilitates the development of emotional intelligence.

We predict that (a) people’s attention to emotion will increase the intensity of their emotional experience, further highlighting the experience. (b) The attention directed to these intense experiences will promote the acquisition of emotional intelligence skills. For example, people who direct attention to their felt emotion will more accurately perceive emotion in others. The studies reported here provide initial tests of this model.

### Study 1

**Method:** The purpose of this study was to assess whether emotional attention predicts emotional intensity. Participants (N = 66, 44 females) completed several scales in counterbalanced order. The Trait Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS) assessed the attention to emotion, as well as the emotional clarity and repair. The Emotional Intensity Scale (EIS) and the Affect Intensity Measure (AIM) assessed emotional intensity. The Emotional Reactivity Scale (ERS) assessed emotional intensity and emotional sensitivity. The Hyper-Sensory Processing Sensitivity Measure (HSP) assessed sensitivity to environmental stimuli.

**Results:** Attention to emotion significantly and consistently predicted intense emotions, but was unrelated to sensitivity to emotional and environmental stimuli (see Table 1). Furthermore, this pattern was distinct from emotional clarity and repair, which are also often associated with emotional intelligence. These findings suggest that that emotional attention intensifies the experience of emotion.

### Study 2

**Method:** To address the second part of the hypothesis, we assessed whether the attention to emotion would predict emotional intelligence over time. To test this, students (N = 43) enrolled in a course on emotion completed a measure of attention to emotion and emotional intensity at the beginning of the semester. Participants also completed a measure of self-perceived emotional intelligence at the beginning of the semester, and again, at the end of the semester.

**Results:** A hierarchical regression analysis showed that emotional attention accounted for a marginally significant amount of variance in Time-2 emotional intelligence, after controlling for Time-1 emotional intelligence and emotional intensity (see Figure 1).

### Table 1. Emotional Attention Predicts Emotional Intensity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional Intensity Measures</th>
<th>Sensitivity Measures</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EIS</td>
<td>AIM</td>
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<tr>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>.46**</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*p = p < .01; ** = p < .001

**Method:** To determine whether attending to felt emotions would improve people’s performance on an emotional intelligence task, participants (N = 153) were randomly assigned to write about either a recent event that made them feel negative (emotion condition) or about their typical day (neutral condition).

Participants then read twelve scenarios, where they identified the extent to which the protagonist in the scenario was experiencing several emotions. During this task, participants were randomly assigned to either focus on their feelings or to rely on their analytical skills when making these judgments.

**Results:** After controlling for emotional intelligence, the analysis revealed a significant interaction, F(1, 148) = 3.96, p = .049 (see Figure 2). Participants were more accurate when they attended to their felt emotion than no emotion, F(1, 148) = 6.06, p = .015. There was no difference in accuracy using the analytic strategy, F < 1, ns.

### Conclusion

These studies show that attention to emotion increases the intensity of emotional experiences (Study 1) and predicts future emotional intelligence (Study 2). Finally, attending to experienced emotions improved emotion perception accuracy (Study 3). These findings provide preliminary support for this model that predicts emotional attention fosters the development of emotional intelligence.

### References


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