



The MDMA bubble: A clean slate of communication for couples

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Relationships are important

Research Questions

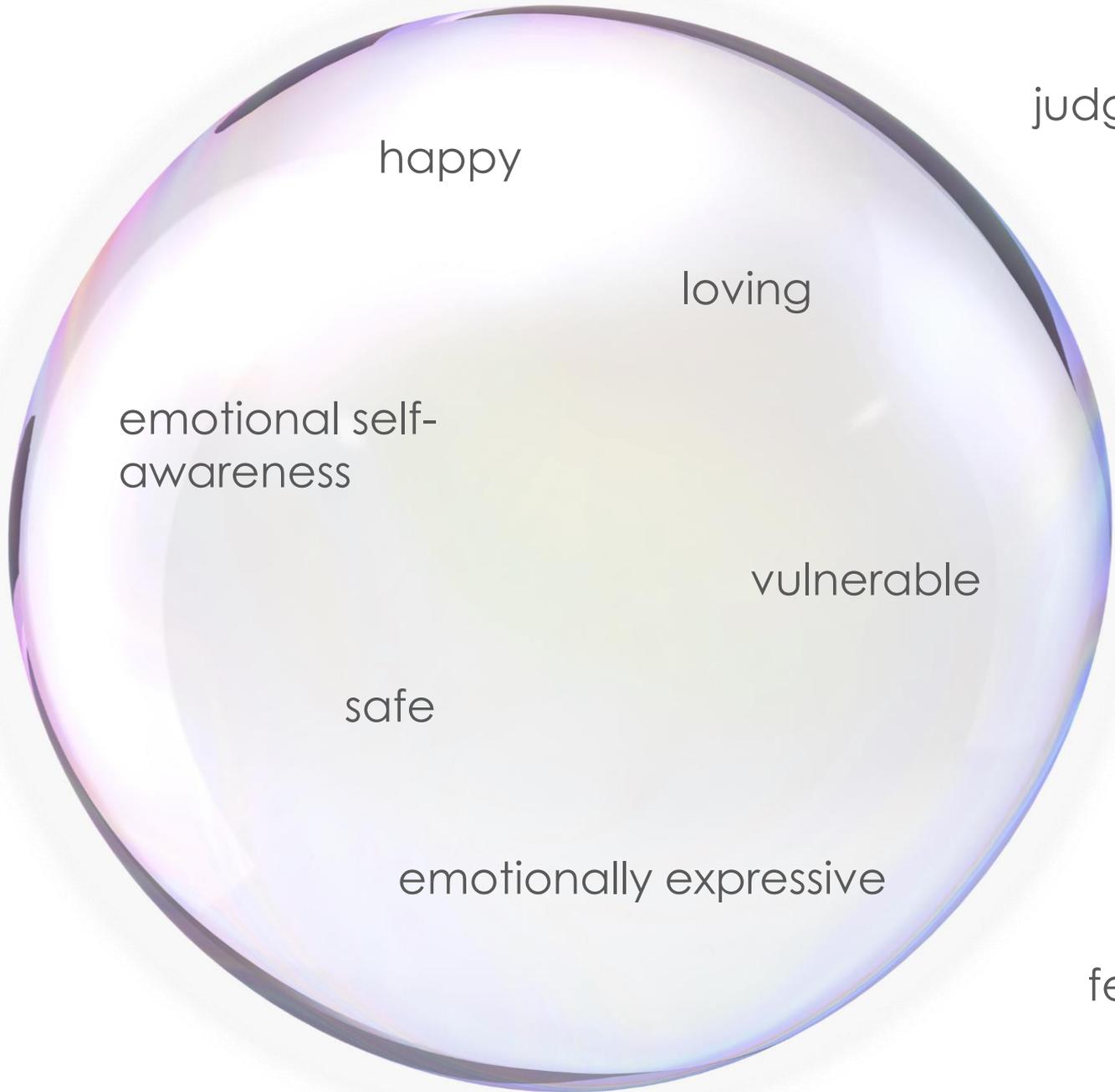
- What does being close mean to couples and how does this play out in their everyday lives together?
- How is closeness created and experienced by partners while taking MDMA together?
- How do couples understand their relationship as being influenced by their ecstasy experiences in the short and long-term?

Methodology

- To examine the lived experience of couples who take MDMA together
- 10 couples: semi-structured interviews
 - No previous issues with drug addiction
 - Taken MDMA together 5 times or more
- Analysis guided by theoretical ideas from the philosophy and psychology of emotions

Philosophy & psychology of emotions

- Emotions give our lives meaning (Damasio, 1994)
- We 'are' our emotions as well as our thoughts
- Emotion is not just a private matter but a way of interacting with the world
- Vulnerability at the core of love and connection
(Brown, 2015)



judgment

happy

loving

emotional self-
awareness

vulnerable

safe

emotionally expressive

anger

fears

Inside the bubble

Dan: you feel like you're **floating in a warm tub of, warm goo** and you're just totally protected and **you can say anything...**it's overpowering...

It's like, **no matter what she said, it was like everything made me love her more and more** [laughs]...you come back down off of that but now you have two associations with that information. You got the typical response where you're angry and pissed off...and you also have this, this connection and association to it where it's like the **deepest connection** you've ever had with a person at the same time (Couple 4 – Dan & Emily)

Traces of the bubble

Emily: it certainly gives you **a point to reflect back on** and...work[s] as a reminder to be like that...both of us could be **more affectionate...**

I certainly think it's had a lasting effect...knowing now that it's like **absolute truth** is out, I wouldn't want to bring a line back into our relationship, you know, even little things. **And just having this nice, clean slate and not wanting to ruin it**

(Couple 4 – Emily & Dan)

Permanent changes to the self

Nick: I **wasn't emotionally available enough** I don't think maybe ever for the woman and it really just kind of **kicks your ass down that road...** I don't think...I could've gone down that road maybe ever... **I didn't have the vulnerable life.** I didn't go through major break-ups. I didn't, you know, I've never really taken major risks...in relationships. One way or the other, I [was] just a serial dater my whole life and, although compassionate towards people I'd dated, **it kind of stayed more on the surface and you just, that's all removed during a heavy MDMA experience...** one of the things I was afraid of, that it wasn't going to stay or was just, am I developing a chemical romance? Uh but it wasn't... it stayed (Couple 10 – Nick & Clara)

Conclusions

- MDMA allows couples to discuss difficult issues
- Effects of MDMA not limited to when a couple are on the drug
 - Enhanced communication
 - Reminder to be more affectionate
 - Prompted to be a more emotionally expressive person
- Implications:
 - MDMA-assisted couples therapy

Thank you!

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