

Influence of Self-esteem, Closeness of Relationship and Gender on Self-disclosure

Chinonso, L. Nwanosike & Barnabas, E. Nwankwo, Ph.D

Department of Psychology,
Caristas University, Enugu

Abstract

This study investigated the influence of self-esteem, closeness of relationships and gender on self-disclosure. One hundred and fifty-three students (81 males and 72 females) of Caritas University with a mean age of 19.54 years participated in the study. The instruments used to measure the variables were the modified version of the Marital Self Disclosure Questionnaire (MSDQ) (Waring, Holden, & Wesley, 1998) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Morris & Rosenberg, 1965) and the Closeness of Relationship Scale, developed by the researchers. The research adopted a survey design and the data were analyzed using ANOVA statistics. The results indicated that self-disclosure and gender influenced self-disclosure among young people. There was no significant influence of self-esteem on self-disclosure. The results also showed an interaction between gender and closeness of relationship on self-disclosure.

Keywords: *Self-disclosure, gender, marital status, family, self-esteem, close relations, Nigeria.*

Relationships are essential to an individual's general satisfaction with life. Relationships also range from best friends to casual and influence the decisions we make and the way in which we see ourselves (Kenrick & Trost, 2000). Relationships differ in the degree of closeness and satisfaction (Kendrick & Trost, 2000). Some relationships such as friendships, start out as casual before becoming intimate. The type and lengths of relationships people form are greatly influenced by their personal expectations. People expect their relationships to fulfill different purposes and thus react according to their personal expectations for every relationship (Knapp, 1984; Rands & Levinger, 1979). People tend to be satisfied when their relationships are going well and unsatisfied when their relationships are not going well. Thus, relationships are important because they help people to be optimistic about life and they come with attendant rewards (Cramer, 1998). Rewards are the amount of pleasure and satisfaction derived from a relationship. The rewards of close relationships include companionship, life satisfaction, and self-esteem. Relationship costs are how much work is required to maintain the relationship. The costs of close relationships are conflict, personal sacrifices, and compromise. When the costs outweigh the rewards, relationships tend to be distressed and conflicted. When the rewards outweigh the costs, the relationship will be able to develop and become more intimate (Gayle & Preiss, 2002). People are not likely to have the same expectations for close relationships as they do for their acquaintance relationships. Relationship expectations are often altered by communication, such

that expectations for the maintenance of a relationship typically increase as communication becomes more personal. Casual acquaintances do not disclose as much as close friends and thus have fewer relationship expectations. Relationship expectations can also be altered by communication through causing distant or terminated relationships and sometimes on how much is disclosed among the partners.

Self-disclosure involves revealing personal information to another with the implicit or explicit understanding that it will not be relayed further. It is the private nature of the information that distinguishes this sort of self-disclosure as a secret and through it an individual lets himself or herself be known to the other person (Jourard, 1971). Self-disclosure “reduces the mystery” between people (Jourard, 1971). An important literature on self-disclosure involves the distinction between self-disclosure given and self-disclosure received. Self-disclosure given involves a person revealing details about themselves to another individual. Alternatively, perhaps self-disclosure is more important at the beginning of an intimate relationship and levels off as the relationship progresses. Higher levels of self-disclosure and quality communication generally lead to more liking and closeness (e.g., Knapp, 1984; Gayle & Preiss 2002). In the self-disclosure process, however, there are two roles: the role of the discloser and the role of the disclosure recipient. The discloser shares personal information, whereas the recipient listens and receives information. Turn-taking or reciprocity in disclosure is common in interactions (e.g., Dindia, & Duck, 2000), but self-disclosure can also be imbalanced and such situations highlight the distinction between the two roles. Being in the role of a discloser can be rewarding and gratifying, but cannot lead to the establishment of familiarity to the same extent. This indicates therefore, that receiving self-disclosure (in comparison to giving self-disclosure) leads to more liking and other positive interpersonal impressions (e.g., feelings of closeness). Although communication can sometimes result in the termination of a relationship, relationships typically progress as communication involves increasing amounts of self-disclosure (Gayle & Preiss, 2002).

Self-disclosure is any information a person verbally communicates to another (Cozby, 1973). Dindia and Duck (2000) described self-disclosure as a stable personality variable that may directly affect relationships. The basic facets of self-disclosure are breadth, duration, and intimacy (Omarzu, 2000). Breadth refers to the variety of topics a person willingly discloses to others. Relationships typically begin with basic topics before more personal thoughts and feelings are revealed. The breadth of disclosure can also refer to the various contexts people use to communicate (e.g. Internet, telephones). Duration is usually the amount of time people spend sharing personal information with others, however duration can often include the longevity of a relationship as well. Self-disclosure increases with the duration of a relationship. Intimacy in self-disclosure is the importance people place on the topics they discuss. A relationship can have

breadth and duration but lack intimacy. For example, people who work together may discuss a variety of topics over a long period of time and still never disclose private information to each other.

An equal distribution in each of the three factors of self-disclosure is necessary for a relationship to be satisfying (Parks, 2000). Self-disclosure is a main factor in the initiation, maintenance, and deterioration of relationships (Derlega, Metts, Petrino, & Margulis, 1993). Close relationships can help a person maintain or enhance their level of self-esteem by providing emotional and social support. Usually characterized by trust, intimacy, and stability, close relationships are often very personal and caring. Best friendships are a form of close relationships that thrive on high amounts of self-disclosure. Small talk is a type of communication often seen in the initial development of a relationship (Parks, 2000). Acquaintances may choose to remain in this stage or progress their relationship by revealing disclosures that are more intimate. Through disclosing personal thoughts and feelings, people are better able to share and understand mutual information. As relationships become established, disclosing personal information becomes more valuable to the relationship's continuation (Parks, 2000). However, self-disclosure is also perceived as a cost because personal disclosures create an obligation for the listener to return the disclosure with the same amount of breadth and intimacy. Thus, self-disclosure in relationships can be both rewarding and costly

Gender Differences in Self Disclosure

According to the norm of reciprocity, people tend to respond similarly to any self-disclosure they receive (Cozby, 1973; Dindia, 2002). Although reciprocity may not come immediately, self-disclosure must be reciprocated across the duration of a relationship. The level of stress within a relationship remains low when people feel their disclosures are being reciprocated. People who mutually share their disclosures tend to feel well adjusted and satisfied with their relationships (Pearce & Sharp, 1973). Relationships with unequal distributions of self-disclosure do not sustain for long periods of time. People who do not mutually disclose are often maladjusted and dissatisfied with their relationships. Individual characteristics, such as sex of the discloser, also determine how and why people communicate in their relationships. Women tend to be consistently more self-disclosing than men overall and women are more likely than men to be the recipients of others' disclosure (Dindia & Allen, 1992; Dolgin, Meyer, & Schwartz, 1991). Furthermore, men primarily disclose superficial information, whereas women disclose meaningful information (Payne, 2001). In other words, a person's willingness or reluctance to disclose reflects the culture of society and individual life experiences (Jourard, 1971). However, self-disclosure was significantly related to relationship satisfaction for both males and females (Vera & Betz 1992).

Self-disclosure and self-esteem

Another major determinant of self-disclosure is self-esteem (Sahlstein & Allen, 2002). Self-esteem is often measured by the number of positive or negative attributions people make about themselves (Rosenberg, 1965). Two major aspects of self-esteem are competence and worth. Competence is the degree to which people believe in their abilities. High self-esteem individuals believe they are capable of performing more adequately than those low in self-esteem on social tasks such as making friends (Baumeister, 1993). In addition, high self-esteem individuals attribute positive events to skill whereas low self-esteem individuals attribute positive events to chance (Baumeister, 1993). Worth is the extent to which people consider themselves to be of value to others. Although both high and low self-esteem individuals believe that being socially desirable is important, low self-esteem individuals lack confidence in their appeal to others. High self-esteem individuals, however, are confident of their ability to appeal to others (Baumeister, 1993). Feedback from others provides social validation of a person's positive qualities and accomplishments (Schimel, Arndt, Pyszczynski, & Greenberg, 2001). This validation is needed in order to maintain a person's level of self-esteem. Social validation affects self-esteem by making people either feel generally liked or disliked. For example, a compliment can reinforce a person's level of self-esteem in the same way that a rude comment can damage another person's level of self-esteem. However, people often see themselves as a reflection of the perceptions they imagine others may have of them and not as they truly perceive themselves to be (Leary, Haupt, Strausser, & Chokel, 1998; Rosenberg, 1965). Low self-esteem people often have such a difficult time finding positive aspects of their identity that they engage in downward social comparisons. High self-esteem people tend to be certain of their identity and thus engage in upward social comparisons (Baumeister, 1993). In other words, low self-esteem people compare themselves to others to enhance their self-esteem whereas high self-esteem people compare themselves to others to maintain their level of self-esteem.

Self-disclosure can be affected by an individual's self-esteem (Dolgin, Meyer, & Schwartz, 1991; Sahlstein & Allen, 2002). A person low in self-esteem is not likely to be as self-disclosing as someone high in self-esteem because of the amount of interpersonal risk involved in disclosure.

When people disclose their intimate thoughts and feelings, they become vulnerable to embarrassment and risk damaging to their self-esteem (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Because high self-esteem people believe in their ability to communicate well, they are less restricted than are low self-esteem people from sharing personal information (Vera & Betz, 1992). People with high self-esteem are more confident in their abilities and are therefore more willing to reveal personal information than are people with low self-esteem (Schimel et al. 2001).

Statement of Problem

Satisfied relationships can provide people with emotional and social support, whereas distressed relationships can lead to mental health problems such as depression and anxiety

(Sergin, 2000). Even though relationships range from best friends to casual acquaintances, the decisions we make and the way in which we see ourselves (Kenrick & Trost, 2000). Casual acquaintances do not disclose as much as close friends and thus have fewer relationship expectations. Relationship expectations can also be altered by communication through causing distant or terminated relationships (Knapp, 1984; Rands & Levinger, 1979). Although communication can sometimes result in the termination of a relationship, relationships typically progress as communication involves increasing amounts of self-disclosure. Close relationships can help a person maintain or enhance their level of self-esteem by providing emotional and social support. Relationships with unequal distributions of self-disclosure do not sustain for long periods of time. People who do not mutually disclose are often maladjusted and dissatisfied with their relationships. Sex differences in disclosure are attributed to the opposing values and expectations brought on from socialization (Jourard, 1971). Women expect their relationships to be emotionally satisfying, whereas men expect their relationships to be functionally satisfying (e.g., companionship). One might expect that self-disclosure would be more important for females' satisfaction than males' satisfaction due to traditional gender beliefs that women are more expressive than men. In addition, high self-esteem individuals attribute positive events to skill whereas low self-esteem individuals attribute positive events to chance (Baumeister, 1993). Self-disclosure can be affected by an individual's self-esteem (Dolgin, Meyer, & Schwartz, 1991; Sahlstein & Allen, 2002). The evidence is strong that self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction are significantly and positively related. The relationship seems to hold across a variety of diverse samples. For example, Vera and Betz (1992) found that participants who were emotionally self-disclosing were more satisfied in their relationships than those who did not self-disclose. Other studies found that self-disclosure given and the ability to elicit self-disclosure from others was related to relationship satisfaction (Sahlstein & Allen 2002; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). The relationship between self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction held true for married couples as well. Although additional research suggested that the spouses' own level of self-disclosure was a stronger predictor of their marital satisfaction than their spouses' level of self-disclosure, both types were statistically significant for husbands and wives. Even in more complicated studies with additional variables, self-disclosure still played a role in relationship satisfaction. Keelan, Karen and Kenneth (1998) found that reported self-disclosure to one's partner and self-rated ability to elicit self-disclosure from others were positively related to satisfaction. Sanderson and Cantor (1997) found among dating couples that those partners with a strong focus on intimacy who elicited self-disclosure experienced greater relationship satisfaction and relationship stability. In addition, a partner with a strong focus on intimacy was able to compensate for having a partner with weaker intimacy goals by working to elicit self-disclosure and interdependence.

In Sheldon's (2013) study that examined gender differences in self-disclosure between Facebook friends and between face-to-face friends. One hundred ninety-seven college women and 120 college men in this study were asked to report their levels of self-disclosure. Women

disclosed to their exclusive face-to-face friends and exclusive Facebook friends more than men. Overall, the findings suggest that, regardless of the medium, both genders disclose more to the person they consider more intimate. Papini et.al. (1990) explored adolescent age and gender differences in patterns of emotional self-disclosure to parents and friends. The sample consisted of 174 junior high school students between the ages of 12 and 15. Results revealed that females exhibited greater emotional self-disclosure to parents and peers than did males, and that emotional self-disclosure to friends was greatest among older adolescents. In addition, while younger adolescents preferred to disclose information about their emotional state to parents, older adolescents chose friends. Dindia and Allen (1992) in a meta-analysis of sex differences in self-disclosure conducted a meta-analysis of 205 studies involving 23,702 students to determine whether there are sex differences in self-disclosure. Across these studies, women disclosed slightly more than men. Sex differences in self-disclosure were significantly greater to female and same-sex partners than to opposite-sex or male partners. When the target has a relationship with the discloser, (i.e., friend, parent, or spouse) women disclosed more than men regardless of whether self-disclosure was measured by self-report or observation. When the target was a stranger, men reported that they disclosed similarly to women; however, studies using observational measures of self-disclosure found that women disclosed more than men. Age and sex have been found not to be significant factors influencing sexual self-disclosure. However, findings revealed that length of intimate relationship is a significant factor that influences self-disclosure. Therefore, this study intends to study the influence of closeness in relationship, self-esteem and gender in self-disclosure among university undergraduates.

Hypotheses

The following are the hypotheses:

1. Self-esteem will significantly influence self-disclosure among participants.
2. Closeness of relationship will significantly influence self-disclosure among participants.
3. There will be a significant gender difference in self-disclosure among participants.

Design/Statistics

The design of this study was a 2 (self-esteem: high vs. low) x 2 (closeness of relationship: best friend vs. casual acquaintance) x 2 (gender of participant: male vs. female) between-subject factorial design. Separate multiple analysis of variance were run for each dependent measure: self-disclosure in general and each of its four facets (i.e., relationship, sex, money, and imbalance).

Participants

One hundred and fifty-three (153) undergraduate students (81 males and 72 females) were randomly drawn from various Social Science Departments (Economics, Political Science, Sociology and Psychology) in Caritas University Enugu to participate in a study titled "Differences in Communication." For taking part in the study, participants received gratification (free lunch) for participation. Participants volunteered for the study by selecting a time from a posted sign-up sheet and arriving at the designated time. The ages of participants were between 18 and 23 years. The majorities of the participants were single and had never been married (84%). Participants were randomly assigned to answer questions concerning either their best friend or a casual acquaintance. To assess sex differences in communication, an equal number of males and females were assigned to each experimental condition (i.e., best friend or casual acquaintance). Each participant was able to complete the study. All participants were treated in accordance with the "ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct" (American Psychological Association, 1992). Three independent variables were evaluated in the present study: self-esteem, closeness of relationship, and gender of the participant. The dependent variable is the amount of self-disclosure.

Measures

The Instrument used was Marital Self Disclosure Questionnaire (Waring, Holden, & Wesley, 1998). This self-disclosure survey contained 40 items. The questionnaire was originally designed to measure self-disclosure in marriages; the questions were slightly modified to evaluate non-marital disclosure patterns for the purpose of this study. For each statement, the term "spouse" was replaced with either "best friend" or "casual acquaintance." The Marital Self-Disclosure Questionnaire was developed to evaluate the frequency of four facets of disclosure: relationship, sex, money, and imbalance. In terms of reliability, Waring, Holden and Wesley (1998) found internal consistency coefficients for each of the four facets that ranged from .68 to .91. An average internal consistency of .33 was also found for the subscales. A range of .51 to .93 coefficient alpha was attained for scores on the subscales of self-disclosure in the current study.

The second instrument used in this study was the Rosenberg (1965) Self Esteem Scale which has 10-items. It was designed to evaluate the way in which people feel about themselves. Following each statement was a 4-point scale with responses labeled (a) strongly agrees, (b) agree, (c) disagree, and (d) strongly disagree. Internal consistency was found for the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale with a .88 coefficient alpha. A significant test-retest correlation of .82 was also found with scores on the Rosenberg Scale. Higher scores signified high self-esteem and lower scores signified low self-esteem. A .88 coefficient alpha demonstrated internal consistency in the present study. In contrast, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was intended to measure a person's global self-esteem.

The third instrument used was Closeness of the relationship scale which was developed by the researcher. It is a 34 item scale, to detect the closeness of the relationship whether best friend or casual acquaintance. A best friend was described as someone with whom the participant felt very close to and in whom the participant could confide. Conversely, a casual acquaintance was described as someone with whom the participant did not feel close to but still encountered on a regular basis (e.g., a coworker or classmate). The two surveys differed only in terms of closeness of the targeted relationship (i.e., best friend or casual Acquaintance). A pilot study was conducted with graduating students of Psychology Department at Caritas University. It should be noted that these students did not participate in the final study. The initial 40 items generated during the focus group discussion were exposed to factor analysis and those items that did not yield up to .30 were dropped. Afterwards 34 items remained and were used in the pilot study. After a test-retest reliability test, the internal consistency yielded .78 coefficient alpha was found for the scale on closeness of relationship.

Procedure

At the beginning of each one-hour session, participants received an explanation of the purpose and procedure of the study. The experimenter told participants that they would be completing a survey concerning the amount of information they reveal about themselves to others and the way in which they see themselves. Before completing the questionnaire, participants were asked to sign an informed consent sheet while being verbally reminded that participation in the study was voluntary, no physical or psychological risks were anticipated, and there was the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. The study was conducted in small groups, rather than on an individual basis, to ensure each participant's complete confidentiality. At all times, the participants' informed consent sheets were kept separate from their responses so that no identifying information was revealed. Following the explanation of the study and collection of informed consent sheets, participants were randomly assigned to take one of two surveys concerning self-disclosure. The two surveys differed only in terms of closeness of the targeted relationship (i.e., best friend or casual Acquaintance). Depending on the questionnaire they received, participants were instructed to imagine either their best friend or a casual acquaintance that was of the same sex as them; also to keep the same person in mind when answering all the survey questions and that the person they imagined could either be a current best friend/casual acquaintance or one from the past. On the cover of the survey, participants read a short paragraph indicating which person they were asked to think about and a brief definition of that kind of person (i.e., best friend or a casual acquaintance). All answers were scored such that higher scores indicated greater amounts of self-disclosure and lower scores represented smaller amounts of self-disclosure. Participants were given four separate scores for each of the facets of disclosure as well as a total score for their overall amount of disclosure. Higher scores signified high self-esteem and lower scores signified low self-esteem. A .88 coefficient alpha demonstrated internal consistency in the present study. People are ranked as being either high or low in global self-

esteem. Finally, participants were asked questions concerning demographic information (e.g., sex, age) to assess the nature of the sample being used in the study. Additionally, participants were asked about the length of the relationship they imagined to determine if there would be a correlation between the time span of the relationship and the amount of self-disclosure. As a manipulation check, participants were asked to report the sex of the person they imagined. Participants were instructed to imagine a person of the same sex so the sex of the target person could be controlled.

Results

Table 1: ANOVA Table for Self-esteem, Closeness of Relationships, and Gender as factors in Self-disclosure of Young People.

Source	Levels	df	F	Sig
Self Esteem	High	1	50.77	.09
	Low			
Closeness of Relationship		1	64.85	.00
	Sex		97.23	.00
	Money		108.08	.00
	Inbalance		29.57	.00
Gender	Male	1	14.56	.00
	Female			
Gender x Closeness of Relationship		1	3.34	.00
Error		145		
Total		153		

A total of 153 persons participated in the study (males – 81, females – 72, low self-esteem – 70, high self-esteem- 83, best friendship – 76 and casual acquaintances – 77)

ANOVA table above shows that closeness of relationship and gender are significant factors in self-disclosure of young persons, as individual factors. Self-esteem was not significant in this study. There was an interaction effects between closeness of relationship and gender.

The result of the analysis indicated that self-esteem does not have a statistically significant influence in self-disclosure $F(1,145) = 50.77, p > .001$. Therefore hypothesis one is rejected. The result also indicated that closeness of relationship and gender have significant influences in self-disclosure $F(1,145) = 64.85, p < .001$ and $F(1,145) = 14.56 < .001$ respectively. Therefore hypothesis two and three were accepted.

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations of the Dimension of Closeness of the Relationship on the Facets of Self-Disclosure

Facets of Self-Disclosure	Best friendship		Casual acquaintance	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Relationship	16.43	3.33	12.54	2.68
Sex	16.70	3.33	11.97	2.58
Money	17.38	2.51	13.78	1.78
Imbalance	15.66	1.70	14.11	1.89

Table 3: Table of Means(x) and Standards Deviations (SD) for the treatment levels of the independent variables (IV).

Variables	Levels	Self-disclosure		
		X	SD	N
Gender	Males	58.06	9.16	81
	Females	63.33	11.40	72
Self Esteem	High	61.00	10.48	83
	Low	60.14	10.70	70
Close Relationship	Best Friendship	64.65	8.30	37
	Male	70.93	7.40	39
	Female	52.52	5.46	35
		53.84	7.83	42
	Acquaintance			
	Male			
	Female			
TOTAL				153

The responses were analyzed with ANOVA statistics. The predictor variables were closeness of the relationship, level of self-esteem, and sex of the participant. Participants high in self-esteem ($M = 61.00$, $SD = 10.48$) were not more likely than those low in self-esteem ($M = 60.14$, $SD = 10.70$) to self-disclose. Participants high in self-esteem did not differentiate between close ($M = 67.23$, $SD = 8.59$) and casual ($M = 52.11$, $SD = 6.26$) relationships. Similarly, participants low in self-esteem did not differentiate between close ($M = 68.76$, $SD = 8.22$) and casual ($M = 54.05$, $SD = 6.76$) relationships. In close relationships (i.e., best friends), females

($M = 70.93$, $SD = 7.40$) self-disclosed more than did males ($M = 64.65$, $SD = 8.30$). In distant relationships (i.e., casual acquaintances), females ($M = 53.84$, $SD = 7.83$) self-disclosed no more than did male ($M = 52.52$, $SD = 5.46$).

Females high in self-esteem ($M = 63.72$, $SD = 12.36$) were not more likely than females low in self-esteem ($M = 63.03$, $SD = 10.72$) to self-disclose. Males high in self-esteem ($M = 57.80$, $SD = 8.85$) were not more likely than males low in self-esteem ($M = 58.47$, $SD = 9.76$) to self-disclose.

In close relationships (i.e., best friends), females high in self-esteem ($M = 72.05$, $SD = 6.48$) self-disclosed more than did females low in self-esteem ($M = 69.90$, $SD = 8.17$). However, males high in self-esteem ($M = 63.42$, $SD = 8.22$) self-disclosed no more than did males low in self-esteem ($M = 66.92$, $SD = 8.28$).

In distant relationships (i.e., casual acquaintances), females high in self-esteem ($M = 51.54$, $SD = 7.80$) self-disclosed no more than did males low in self-esteem ($M = 55.42$, $SD = 7.65$). Similarly, males high in self-esteem ($M = 52.40$, $SD = 5.45$) self-disclosed no more than did males low in self-esteem ($M = 52.68$, $SD = 5.61$).

Facets of Self-Disclosure

As expected, there was a main effect of the closeness of the relationship on each of the four facets of self-disclosure: **Relationship** ($F(1,145) = 64.85$, $p < .01$); **Sex** ($F(1,145) = 97.23$, $p < .01$); **Money** ($F(1,145) = 108.08$, $p < .01$), and **Imbalance** ($F(1,145) = 29.57$, $P < .01$). In each of the facets, participants self-disclosed more to best friends than to casual acquaintances (see Table I for means).

There was also a main effect of the gender of the participant on disclosure about the participants' relationships, $F(1,145) = 14.56$, $p < .01$. Females ($M = 15.69$, $SD = 3.75$) self-disclosed more about their relationships in general than did males ($M = 13.43$, $SD = 3.10$). There was an interaction between the closeness of the relationship and sex of the participant on disclosure about relationships, $F(1,145) = 3.34$, $p < .01$. Females self-disclosed more to a best friend ($M = 17.75$, $SD = 2.74$) than to a casual acquaintance ($M = 13.13$, $SD = 3.23$) about the relationship in general. In contrast, males self-disclosed as much to a best friend ($M = 15.00$, $SD = 3.35$) as they did to a casual acquaintance ($M = 12.11$, $SD = 2.14$) about the relationship in general.

There were no other main effects or interactions involving the closeness of the relationship, self-esteem, or sex of the participant on self-disclosure about their relationships, sex, money, or imbalance.

Discussion

This study determined the influence of the closeness of the relationship, sex of the participant, and self-esteem on self-disclosure. It was found that the amount a person self-discloses to others is dependent upon the closeness of the relationship. The participants in the study self-disclosed more to their best friends than to casual acquaintances which corroborates earlier studies (e.g., Parks, 2000; Dindia & Allen, 1992; Vera & Betz, 1992). People are motivated to maintain their close relationships through sharing self-disclosures because close relationships lead to life satisfaction (Sergin, 2000). Self-disclosure patterns also appear to be reciprocal with relationship satisfaction. In other words, close relationships are more satisfying than distant relationships because close relationships typically involve greater amounts of self-disclosure. Conversely, close relationships involve more self-disclosure than distant relationships because close relationships typically involve greater satisfaction (Jourard, 1971). Dindia and Allen (1992) have suggested that self-disclosure questionnaires have more validity when participants are asked about their self-disclosure to a best friend rather than to a casual acquaintance. Participants may answer questions about self-disclosure to a best friend faster than they would answer questions about self-disclosure to a casual acquaintance because there is less to think about. People are generally certain about which topics they would feel comfortable discussing with a best friend and uncertain about which topics they would feel comfortable discussing with a casual acquaintance (Dindia & Allen, 1992). Different results may have been obtained in the present study if participants had been observed discussing an assigned topic with either their best friend or casual acquaintance rather than reporting on the amount they self-disclose to others. Consistent with the literature on sex differences in self-disclosure, female participants self-disclosed more than did male participants in the present study. A number of reasons have been suggested for why women tend to be more self-disclosing than men (Derlega et al., 1993). The most commonly given reason is that men and women are taught starting from childhood to value different aspects of relationships. Youniss and Smollar (1985) found that adolescent girls were more likely than adolescent boys to discuss intimate topics with their friends.

The value differences in relationships taught to children can be seen in the self-disclosure patterns of adults. Even in adulthood, men are expected to adhere to the typical masculine role model of being unemotional in their disclosures. On the other hand, women are often rewarded for being overly emotional in their disclosures (Derlega et al., 1993). A second reason for sex differences in self-disclosure is that women invest more in and expect to gain more reward from their relationships than do men (Duck & Wright, 1993). Women expect their relationships to be emotionally supportive in which intimate disclosures can be shared; in contrast, men expect their relationships to be activity based in which intimate disclosures are not needed (Derlega & Berg, 1987). Perhaps men only prefer intimate self-disclosures when trying to develop a romantic relationship but women prefer intimate self-disclosures when trying to develop any of their relationships.

The present study only looked at the amount of self-disclosure in relationships and not the motivation to self-disclose in relationships. Future research should investigate the connection between motivation and self-disclosure in relationships. Despite the number of researchers who believe there are sex differences in self-disclosure (e.g., Dindia & Allen, 1992; Dolgin, Meyer, & Schwartz, 1991; Jourard, 1971), some researchers believe the opposite to be true (e.g., Dimond & Hellkamp, 1969; Plog, 1965). For example, Shaffer et al. (1996) argue that self-disclosure is not affected by the sex of a person but rather by situational variables. In their study, Shaffer et al. showed that women only self-disclosed more than men when in social situations, whereas men self-disclosed more than women when in functional situations. Hill and Stull (1987) also argue that situational factors affect self-disclosure by interacting with the sex of the discloser. That is, Hill and Stull believe that the sex of the target person moderates sex differences in self-disclosure. People tend to self-disclose more to females and same-sex targets than to males and opposite-sex targets (Shaffer et al., 1996; Dindia & Allen, 1992). The sex of the target person was controlled in the present study. Participants were asked to imagine a person of the same sex when responding to all items on the questionnaire. Different results may have been obtained in the present study if the sex of the target person had been manipulated. The instructions could have been counterbalanced so that some participants were asked to imagine a same-sex relationship and some participants were asked to imagine an opposite-sex relationship. It could be true that men do self-disclose as much as women in their close relationships but then are selective about deciding when to disclose.

Derlega et al. (1993) suggest that men may be less emotional than women in their overall self-disclosures but just as emotional as women in their self-disclosures to a best friend. Caldwell and Peplau (1982) found that men value intimate relationships (e.g., friendships) as much as do women. However, women placed more value on relationships based around emotions, whereas men placed more value on relationships based around tasks (Caldwell & Peplau, 1982).

The nature of the relationships imagined by participants was not assessed in the present study. Different results may have been obtained if participants were asked questions about the nature of the relationship in addition to the length of the relationship. It could also be true that gender role moderates self-disclosure in relationships. Lavine and Lombardo (1984) found that androgynous participants disclosed more than did masculine, feminine, and undifferentiated participants. Furthermore, Lavine and Lombardo found that self-disclosure in social situations increased as femininity increased and self-disclosure in activity situations increased as masculinity increased. Gender role was not assessed in the present study but may have had an effect on the results. Future studies should involve the participants' gender role along with the participants' sex.

Self-esteem had no simple effect on self-disclosure in the present study. It was hypothesized that high self-esteem individuals would self-disclose more than low self-esteem individuals because people high in self-esteem have greater self-confidence (Dolgin, Meyer, & Schwartz, 1991). However, high self-esteem participants self-disclosed no more than did low self-esteem participants. Perhaps self-esteem was not influential because of the overwhelming effect of the closeness of the relationship on self-disclosure. Regardless of their level of self-esteem, people may feel confident self-disclosing in their close relationships because of the emotional support derived from close relationships (Cramer, 1998). High and low self-esteem individuals do not differ in the number of friends they have but rather in their confidence to make friends (Baumeister, 1993). It seems that self-esteem is outweighed by the closeness of the relationship once friendships have been formed. Self-esteem may play more of a role in the initiation of relationships rather than the maintenance of relationships (Baumeister, 1993), if participants had been paired with a stranger and instructed to complete a specific task before filling out the questionnaires, different results may have been obtained for self-esteem and self-disclosure in newly formed relationships. The closeness of the relationship and sex of the participant had an interactive effect on self-disclosure. Females self-disclosed more than did males to a best friend, whereas females self-disclosed no more than did males to a casual acquaintance. There were no interactions involving self-esteem and closeness of the relationship or self-esteem and sex of the participant. In fact, self-esteem only appeared to have a moderating effect on the amount people self-disclose to others when paired with sex of the participant and closeness of the relationship. Females high in self-esteem self-disclosed more than did females low in self-esteem when the relationship was close but not when the relationship was distant. Males high in self-esteem self-disclosed no more than did males low in self-esteem when the relationship was either close or distant. Perhaps disclosure in distant relationships was not affected by individual differences because people are more likely to make investments in their close relationships (Knapp, 1984).

Self-disclosure is a key part of the enhancement of relationships because of the social rewards derived from disclosing to others. The amount people invest in a relationship is determined by how rewarding the relationship is perceived to be. People are willing to self-disclose when their relationships are rewarding and not willing to self-disclose when their relationships are costly (Gayle & Preiss, 2002). Participants could have been asked to report on their level of investment and satisfaction within the relationship imagined during the study. Different results may have been found in the current study if it had not been assumed that high self-disclosure meant high investment and satisfaction. Participants may find certain relationships highly satisfying simply because those relationships do not require a lot of self-disclosure. The hypotheses for each of the four facets of self-disclosure received less support than did the hypotheses for the overall amount of self-disclosure. However, participants self-disclosed more to a best friend than to a casual acquaintance in each facet. The finding in the present study that

people self-disclose more to their best friend than to their casual acquaintance in all topics further strengthens the argument that self-disclosure is dependent upon the closeness of the relationship (Parks, 2000).

Conclusion

The researchers assume that it is difficult to assess the full effect of personality variables on self-disclosure because each variable tends to be multifaceted. Both self-esteem and self-disclosure are multifaceted and could potentially affect each other in a number of ways. As seen with the facets of self-disclosure in the present study, scores for the facets can show a different pattern than the scores for the overall disclosure. When varying results are found in a study, it is hard to determine which is indicative of the participants' true responses. The researchers believe that relationships cannot be fully understood unless studied at the dyadic level. Just as self-disclosure must involve reciprocity, relationships must involve interactions between people. People are shaped by their distinct personalities which in turn factor into the relationships people form. Research on relationships is essential to understanding a major source of joy and sorrow in life. Future studies need to be conducted to better determine how self-esteem and self-disclosure affects the way people interact in social relationships.

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