

## Gender-based Differences in the Patterns of Emotional Self-disclosure

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The present study aimed at investigating the gender differences in emotional self-disclosure. The sample consisted of 300 university students (with gender equivalence) age ranged from 20-35 years. Emotional Self-disclosure Scale (Snell, 1990) was used to measure the degree of self-disclosure in adults. Results showed significant gender differences in emotional self-disclosure, women disclosed their emotions more to their friends as compared to men. Results subjected to male and female recipients suggested that women disclose their emotional feelings more to their female friends, and men do towards their male friends. The study further found that there are differential tendencies among male and female students in disclosing their different types of emotions to male and female recipients.

*Keywords:* Self-disclosure, self-description, interpersonal problems, emotional expressiveness, gender

Individuals take part in self-disclosure when one individual reveals personal information about him/herself to another individual. Disclosure reciprocity is an important aspect of self-disclosure. This occurs when one person discloses information on a particular intimacy level; the other person will also disclose information on that same level (Burger, 2000). Important form of self-disclosure is emotional self-disclosure. One study defined *emotional self-disclosure* as any intentional and voluntary verbal utterance that conveys information about the emotional state of the individual (Papini & Farmer, 1990). In other words, emotional self-disclosure is when one individual shares personal feelings with another individual.

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Howell and Conway (1990) have found that positive emotional self-disclosures are more likely to be made than negative emotional self-disclosures, because it is seemingly more appropriate to self-disclose positive emotions.

Jourard (1971) defines emotional self-disclosure as making ourselves "transparent" to others through our communication i.e., when we tell others things about ourselves which help them to see our uniqueness as a human being. A fully functioning person, individuals should both be willing and able to disclose intimate, personal information to the significant people in their lives. Andrews, Clark, and Zinker (1988) distinguished between self-description and self-disclosure. *Self-description* involves communication that levels "public layers", whereas, self-disclosure involves communication that reveals more private, sensitive, and confidential information.

Individuals are generally not comfortable with self-disclosing to others due to the fear of embarrassment (Burger, 2000). Burger found that by keeping information hidden from the people in our lives, more stress and worry develop than it would from the actual process of self-disclosure. Moreover, in general women tend to be quick to self-disclose and men tend to be slow to self-disclose. Each day people must decide how much they are willing to share with others various kinds of information about themselves. It includes all kinds of information including life experiences, personal circumstances, feelings, dreams, opinions, and so on. Most importantly, self-disclosure is sharing how you are reacting to the other person and the current situation. Self-disclosure is more of an art than a definitive set of behaviors that make up a skill. Therefore, learning to self-disclose when one is hurt or happy can hardly be set in outline form (Belk, Garcia, Hernandez, & Snell, 1998).

Self-disclosure is seen as a useful strategy for sharing information with others. By sharing information, we become more intimate with other people and our interpersonal relationship is strengthened. It is not simply providing information to another person but it is sharing information with others that they would not normally know or discover. It involves risk and vulnerability for damaging relationship and losing trust on the part of person sharing the information (Levesque, Steciuk, & Ledley, 2002). It is one way to learn about how another person thinks and feels. Once one person engages in self-disclosure, it is implied that the other person will also disclose personal information. This is known as the norm of reciprocity (Derleg, Margulis, & Winsted, 1987). Mutual disclosure

deepens upon trust in the relationships and helps both people understand each other more (Belk et al., 1998).

Self-disclosure (done appropriately) is a sign of mental health (Greenberg & Stone, 1992). Research has shown that self-disclosers are more self-content, more adaptive and competent, more perceptive, more extroverted, more trusting and positive towards others than non-disclosing persons. Appropriate disclosing leads to liking; and liking leads to disclosing (Johnson, 1981). Self-disclosure develops communication skills that allow us to clearly and completely inform others about how we see a situation and what we hope or expect to happen. Disclosing resolves conflicts and interpersonal problems, and will help to get more energy and to be more spontaneous (Dombeck, 1995).

With the several advantages there are some risks also involved in to self-disclosure. One major risk is that the other person may not respond favorably to the information. Self-disclosure does not automatically lead to favorable impressions. Another risk is that the other person will gain power in the relationship because of the information they possess. Finally, too much self-disclosure or self-disclosure that comes too early in a relationship can damage the relationship (Weber, Johnson, & Corrigan, 2004).

Self-disclosure is shown to involve several different patterns. Women seem to disclose more than men (Hargie, Tourish, & Curtis, 2001). Results showed that women were more willing to disclose to same-sex friends and strangers than were men. Levesque et al. (2002) found that the difference between intimate and everyday disclosure is greater among men. Individuals differ in their tendencies to disclose as well. Individuals will disclose more to one person than another and dyadic reciprocity for intimate disclosure is very significant in self-disclosure. Individuals exhibit only a weak tendency to base their disclosure on the length of a relationship. In other words, self-disclosure is situation specific.

Women typically describe their friendships in terms of closeness and emotional attachment. What characterizes friendships between women is the willingness to share important feelings, thoughts, experiences, and support. Women devote a good deal of time and intensity of involvement to female friends. Women usually make a deep commitment to their female friends and their friendships that usually cover a broad spectrum, while men's friendships tend to be segmented and centered around particular activities (Gouldner & Strong, 1987; Lenz & Myerhoff, 1985; McGill, 1985; Pogrebin,

1987). While women's friendships are usually defined as self-revealing, accepting, and intimate, men usually shy away from intimacy and closeness. Authors identify at least three barriers to close friendships among men i.e., competition between men, traditional masculine stereotypes about "real men", and fear of homosexuality (Fasteau, 1991; McGill, 1985; Miller, 1983).

Sherrod (1989) found that gender differences in friendship showed that men rate their friendship as less intimate than do women, at least in terms of self-disclosure and emotional expressiveness. Men's friendships nevertheless serve to buffer stress and reduce depression in the same way that women's friendships do. When men do achieve a high level of intimacy with other men, they usually follow a different path than women, one that emphasizes activities and companionship over self-disclosure and emotional expressiveness. Women can disclose more to strangers or new acquaintances than men. Harvey and Dmarzu (1997) found that men self-disclosed less than women did. However, neither a woman nor a man is liked if he/she discloses being highly competitive. So, women are liked if they disclose quite a lot. Men are liked only if they disclose a little personal information but not too much. Neither women nor men are liked if they share nothing about themselves (Kleinke & Kahn, 1980).

People who are aloof and intellectual, especially men, may think of feelings as being unimportant nuisances. Such people could profit most from these new skills, but they must first see the advantages of being real and open. Lacking in practice, they must learn what kind of disclosures are most appropriate, to whom, and under what circumstances (Dindia & Allen, 1992). Women's and men's emotional disclosures to their spouses/lovers and to their male and female friends are influenced by their own gender and by the personal characteristics of the disclosure recipient (Snell, 1988).

People's willingness to reveal their emotional experiences involves disclosure recipients who are less well known but with whom intimacy is normative (Garfield, 1978). Thus, people's willingness to disclose their emotions to friends are not only of interest in its own right, such disclosure can serve as a valuable point of comparison with which to evaluate disclosure to one's friends. On the basis of several prior investigations (Levinger & Senn, 1967; Notarius & Johnson, 1982; Snell, 1988), it was examined that women would be generally more willing than men to discuss their emotional experiences with others, but that this pattern of emotional disclosure would vary in response to the disclosure recipients studied in the

present investigation.

The masculine role interferes with and inhibits men's as well as women's emotional disclosures. Research focusing on the relationship between gender and disclosure is not entirely new, although the vast majority of these efforts have simply relied on gender as a measure of the masculine role. Most of the investigators (Fasteau, 1991; McGill, 1985; Miller, 1983) assume that men (and perhaps women) who subscribe to the masculine role are characterized by a tendency to be less open and personally revealing about their emotions and feelings

The literature indicates that culture may moderate the relationship between people's gender and their disclosure tendencies (Franco, Malloy, & Gonzalez, 1984; LeVine & Franco, 1981). Some researchers argue, for example, that in Hispanic cultures the masculine identity requires that men display a cool aloofness from others (Mosher & Sirkin, 1984). However, the relevant gender literature is inconsistent with respect to cultural differences in disclosure, so there was a need to investigate the emotional disclosure of men and women in western and eastern culture. Thus, in the present study, the cultural generality of emotional disclosure among males and females from Pakistan was examined. It was anticipated that men would generally report less emotional disclosure than women and the men, keeping in with the structures of the traditional male roles in Pakistan, would report the least emotional disclosure of all (Mosher & Sirkin, 1984).

The present study aims to find out the gender differences in emotional self-disclosure. Specifically, the present research has been planned to check either male or female students disclose more to their female friends or to their male friends. To achieve these objectives the following hypotheses were formulated.

1. Female students will show more extensive emotional self-disclosure as compared to male students.
2. Female students will disclose their emotional feelings towards their female friends, and male students will do towards their male friends.

## Method

### *Sample*

The sample consisted of 300 students (with gender equivalence) studying in semester system with age range of 20 to 35 years old

belonging to different socioeconomic classes. Sample (students) was selected through purposive convenience sampling from different departments of arts and social sciences of Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan.

### *Instruments*

*Emotional Self-Disclosure Scale (ESDS).* Emotional Self-Disclosure Scale (Snell, 1990) was used to assess the emotional self-disclosure response tendency. It contains 40 items concerned with the different types of feelings and emotions that people experience at one time or another in their life. To respond 5-point rating scale is used; a). *I have not discussed this topic*; b). *I have slightly discussed*; c). *I have moderately discussed this topic*; d). *I have almost fully discussed this topic* and; e). *I have fully discussed this topic*. This scale consists of eight subscales, each containing five separate items. The labels of these emotional disclosure subscales along their item numbers are *Depression* (1, 9, 17, 25, 33); *Happiness* (2, 10, 18, 26, 34); *Jealousy* (3, 11, 19, 27, 35); *Anxiety* (4, 12, 20, 28, 36); *Anger* (5, 13, 21, 29, 37); *Calmness* (6, 14, 22, 30, 38); *Apathy* (7, 15, 23, 31, 39); and *Fear* (8, 16, 24, 32, 40).

For scoring, each and every item is rated from 0 to 4. There were no negatively scored items in each subscale. The five items on each subscale are then summed, so that higher score corresponds to greater emotional disclosure for each type of emotion, as measured by the eight subscales on the ESDS. The possible score range on each of the subscale is 0 - 20, and possible total score for the whole test is 0-160. Higher the score means greater the degree of self-disclosure in individual for each type of emotion.

### *Procedure*

To achieve the objectives of the present study, the participants included both male and female students. To select the participants, the most common form of the nonprobability sampling approach --- purposive and convenience sampling techniques were used. The students were contacted at their departments after taking their consent to participate in the research. The ESDS was administered to the participants. They completed ESDS for two disclosure recipients i.e., male and female friends. Subsequently, they were provided with a detailed explanation of the purpose of study and were instructed how

to respond to the scale. They were requested to read the items and answer them very carefully without leaving any item. They were assured that the given information would only be used for research purpose.

## Results

To study the significance of gender differences in disclosing the different types of feelings for two recipients i.e., males and females, independent sample *t*-test analysis and Two Way ANOVA was performed and to check either male or female students disclose more to their male friends or to female friends, paired sample *t*-test was computed.

Table 1  
*Means, Standard Deviations, and t-value for the Scores of Male and Female Students on ESDS (N = 300)*

Students	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>
Female	150	139.19	16.12	1.79*
Male	150	137.18	16.97	

*df* = 298. \**p* < .05.

Result depicted in Table 1 shows a significant difference between female and male students at *p* < .05. Female students disclose their feelings more to others as compared to male students. This confirms the first hypothesis of the study.

Table 2  
*Means, Standard Deviations, and t-values for the Scores of Male and Female Students towards their Male and Female friends on ESDS (N = 300)*

Recipients	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>
Male <sup>a</sup> Students			
Female	92.14	21.11	4.11**
Male	131.13	9.17	
Female <sup>a</sup> Students			
Female	117.40	17.09	7.62**
Male	84.68	14.23	

Note: <sup>a</sup>*n* = 150 for both male and female students.

*df* = 298. \*\**p* < .01.

Table 2 indicates highly significant differences in disclosing the feelings of students towards males and females recipients. Results show that female students disclose their feelings more extensively towards their female friends while the males disclose towards their male friends, hence accepting the second hypothesis of the research.

Table 3  
*Two Way ANOVA for 2(Gender of Participants) × 2(Gender of Recipients) on ESDS (N = 300)*

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Gender of participants	4.85	1	4.85	4.12*
Gender of recipients	0.68	1	0.68	0.58*
Participants x Recipients	0.98	1	0.98	0.84*
Error	464.91	296	1.18	
Total	466.56	299		

\* $p < .05$ .

Further to check the interaction between gender of participants and of recipient Two Way ANOVA ( $2 \times 2$ ) on ESDS was carried out (see Table 3). For mean differences of four groups see Table 2.

Table 4  
*Means, Standard Deviations, and t-values Showing Emotional Self-disclosure of Female Students towards Female and Male Recipients on the Subscales of ESDS (N = 150)*

Subscales	Female Recipients		Male Recipients		t
	M	SD	M	SD	
Depression	10.02	3.08	12.14	2.98	1.27**
Anxiety	11.51	5.23	13.13	4.65	2.28**
Happiness	13.01	6.42	9.09	5.34	1.44*
Jealousy	12.14	4.21	10.05	5.11	2.12**
Anger	14.15	3.12	9.11	3.27	1.19*
Calmness	10.12	4.23	8.23	4.20	1.34*
Apathy	16.13	7.11	12.13	4.64	1.62*
Fear	13.45	4.29	15.12	3.56	2.22**

df = 149. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Table 3 indicates the results of Two Way Analysis of Variance for 2(Gender of participants) × 2(Gender of Recipients) that reveals



the significant main effects of interaction between gender of participants and gender of recipients on emotional self-disclosure. This result implies that gender of participants and gender of recipients both have interactive effects on disclosure patterns of male and female students. Table 2 also supports these findings that indicate female participants disclose more their emotions to their female friends while the male participants disclose to their male friends. Being male and disclosing to male friend is highest ( $M = 131.13$ ,  $SD = 9.17$ ) rather than being female and disclosing to male friends which is the lowest ( $M = 84.68$ ,  $SD = 14.23$ ).

Table 4 reveals the significant differences in disclosing the feelings of female students to male and female recipients. Results show that female students disclose more extensively their feelings of happiness, jealousy, anger, calmness, and apathy to their female friends, while the emotions of depression, anxiety, and fear are disclosed more to the male friends.

Table 5

*Means, Standard Deviations, and t-values Showing Emotional Self-Disclosure of Male Students to Female and Male Recipients on the Subscales of ESDS (N = 150)*

Subscales	Female Recipients		Male Recipients		<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Depression	13.55	2.54	12.04	2.54	1.24
Anxiety	11.18	4.32	13.16	3.77	1.12
Jealousy	13.11	4.32	10.11	3.76	2.54*
Anger	12.12	5.32	10.21	4.85	1.27*
Calmness	9.44	3.55	7.23	2.06	1.74*
Happiness	11.65	4.56	12.43	4.34	2.15*
Apathy	14.12	3.23	15.01	4.26	1.34*
Fear	13.11	3.97	13.16	3.98	1.65

*df* = 149. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Table 5 shows significant differences on the subscales of ESDS of male students for disclosing their emotional feelings to female and male recipients. These results suggest that male students disclose their emotional feelings of jealousy, anger, and calmness to female recipients, and emotional feelings of happiness and apathy to male

recipients. Nonsignificant results are achieved on Depression, Anxiety, and Fear subscales.

## Discussion

Self-disclosure is the process of peeling away the onion layers away. Emotional self-disclosure is a process of making oneself known to specific target persons. Disclosure differences exist across genders (Fivush, Brotman, Buckner, & Goodman, 2000). The same findings are achieved through this research. The present research aimed at determining gender differences in emotional self-disclosure. The study further explored differences in disclosures to the recipients of different gender regarding different emotions disclosed by male and female students.

Research indicated that men and women sometimes diverge in their disclosure tendencies, usually in response to unique characteristics associated with the topic and recipient of the disclosure. To achieve the objectives of present study, students were administered the ESDS for two disclosure recipients --- male and female friends. The results showed that men's and women's emotional disclosures depend on their gender and the specific content of the emotional disclosure.

On the basis of the preceding literature review reflecting the potential impact of gender differences in the context of emotional self-disclosure, the first hypothesis of the study was generated, which states that female students show more emotional self-disclosure as compared to males, has been supported in the present study (see Table 1). The findings are in tune with previous studies conducted by Snell (1988) and Hargie et al. (2001) who reported that men disclosed less than women did. Rubin, Hill, Peplau, and Dunkel-Schetter (1980) generally supported this notion that women self-disclose more than men. Additionally, men were found to reveal their strengths, while women are more likely to reveal their fears. The most robust gender differences in people's emotional expression have been found in the context of narratives about past experiences that involve negative emotions (Fivush et al., 2000). These differences between men's and women's emotional self disclosure are also significant as to convince the reader of the credibility of the finding of present study.

The second hypothesis of this study stated that females would disclose their emotional feelings more towards their female friends, and males would do towards their male friends. This hypothesis has

been supported through this study (see Table 2). This finding can be justified by taking into consideration the central features of the studies by Levesque et al. (2002). According to that, it was found that women were more willing to disclose to same-sex friends and strangers than to men. Further they found that the difference between intimate and everyday disclosure is greater among men, and individuals differ in their tendencies to disclose as well. Women's and men's emotional disclosures to their spouses/lovers and to their male and female friends are influenced by their own gender and by the personal characteristics of the disclosure recipient (Snell, 1988).

For the further support of this claim, in Table 3 the results of Two Way Analysis of Variance for Gender of Participants  $\times$  Gender of Recipients were computed. Results indicate the significant main effects and interaction effect between gender of participants and gender of recipients on emotional self-disclosure showing that both variables have interactive effects on disclosure patterns of male and female students. According to findings, being male and disclosing to male friend is highest ( $M = 131.13$ ,  $SD = 9.17$ ) rather than being female and disclosing to male friends which is the lowest ( $M = 84.68$ ,  $SD = 14.23$ ).

Male and female students will differ in their tendencies to disclose their different type of emotions to their male and female friends, was another objective of the present research. Results indicated (see Table 4) that female students disclosed their emotions of happiness, jealousy, anger, calmness, and apathy more to their female friends, while the emotions of depression, anxiety, and fear are disclosed more to male friends. These results are in tune with the previous studies showing that women devote a good deal of time and intensity of involvement to female friends (Gouldner & Strong, 1987; Lenz & Myerhoff, 1985; McGill, 1985; Pogrebin, 1987). They normally share their feelings of happiness with each other because they think that their friends having the same sex can understand and feel the accurate emotions (Baxter, 1992). The findings further suggested that females disclose their jealousy feelings to their female friends. These findings are inconsistent to Berger (1993) who reported clearly, if female get jealous, she at once discloses such feelings with her male friends not with the female friends. This finding can be justified by taking into consideration that when acting as research participants, males and females might be distorted their reports of emotional functioning in ways that conform to gender difference in disclosure to recipients. A previous study reveals that women in the calm condition were expected to be more willing to disclose pleasant

emotions to other women (Cunningham, Strassberg, & Haan, 1986). The results of study by Snell (1988) support the proposition that women disclose intimate details to both men and women and to their spouse or lover, but there is a significant difference in the matter of apathy feelings, women are more likely to disclose these type of feelings with their female friends as compared to their male friends.

The finding of this study shows that female students are more emotionally self-disclosed to their female friends. It is due to the fact that women feel themselves inferior to their male friends, and think that their male friends will not bear their anger feelings and emotions, so they avoid disclosing in such situation towards their male friends and feel free to disclose these feelings to their female friends (Dindia & Allen, 1992). It can be also justified by considering that friendships between women, more so than between men, are broad and less likely to be segmented, that is, women usually make a deep commitment to their female friends and their friendships usually cover a broad spectrum, while men's friendships tend to be segmented and centered on particular activities.

Results indicate that female students are emotionally self-disclose more to their male friends in the feelings of depression, anxiety, and fear as compared to the female friends. The result is in favor of the findings of the work of Fivush et al. (2000) who reported that when talking about frightening events, girls use more emotional words than boys do. It is concluded that women trust more on men in their fearful, anger, and anxiety feelings as they think that men are stronger to handle such feelings (Eisenberg, Miller, Shell, McNalley, & Shea, 1991).

The findings pertaining to the male students' disclosure suggest (Table 5) that they disclose their feelings of Jealousy, Anger, and Calmness to female friends, while happiness and apathy to male friends. The findings of this research show that males are more emotionally self-disclosed to their male friends in their happiness emotions as compared to their female friends. The reason is that males are more comfortable to discuss their matter of fun with their same sex (Levesque et al. 2002). They normally disclose less, but if they disclose then they are more willing to disclose their positive feelings to female friends and negative to male friends (Lepore & Smyth, 2002). In present research, male students also reported more enduring experiences of sharing their jealousy emotions with female not with male friends. Men normally feel jealous from their male friends; therefore, they directly disclose their jealousy feelings with their own female friends. However, the relevant gender literature is

inconsistent with the present findings. Literature data demonstrated that females were more willing to disclose to same-sex friends than were men (Levesque et al., 2002). Male students are more emotionally self-disclosed towards their female friends in their anger feelings as compared to their male friends. The reason might be that males don't want to give the impression that there is any thing that can create fear full feelings in them (Harber & Wenberg, 2005).

The findings of present study show nonsignificant differences on Depression, Anxiety, and Fear in case of male students. It may imply that as some have argued that men are perhaps less willing than women to discuss their emotions with others, because they adhere more than women do to the so-called masculine role. Psychologists themselves have examined this issue (Balswick & Peek, 1971). Their research concerns the nature and dimensionality of the various personalities attributes, goals, lifestyles, preferences, stereotypes, beliefs, and values typically associated with men. Also included among these issues are the descriptive and prescriptive tendencies that characterize men and their lives (Pleck, 1981). The focus of this scholarly activity is oftentimes referred to globally as the masculine role.

### Conclusion

The present study may be considered as a pioneering research in the area of emotional self-disclosure in relation to gender differences in Pakistani context. The results revealed interesting cultural trends and perspectives on Pakistani sample. On the basis of the findings obtained in the study it is concluded that:

1. The results of the study supported the hypothesis and showed that women show more emotional self-disclosure as compared to men.
2. Women disclose their emotions to female friends more and men to male friends.
3. Results show that women disclose more extensively their feelings of happiness, jealousy, anger, calmness, and apathy, to their female friends, while the emotions of depression, anxiety, and fear are disclosed more to male friends.
4. Men disclose their emotional feelings of jealousy, anger, and calmness to female friends, and emotional feelings of happiness and apathy to male friends. Nonsignificant

differences appeared in sharing their experiences of depression, anxiety, and fear with both male and female recipients.

### *Limitations and Suggestions*

This investigation bore some limitations in that it relied on a convenience sample taken from the Bahauddin Zakariya University Multan, the findings therefore can not be generalized specially to the uneducated sample that have totally different social background. The study may well be replicated in other settings, exploring some more variables which could be associated with emotional self-disclosure e.g., education level, age, rural vs. urban residential settings, and socio economic class.

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