

Gender Sensitivity Measure of Nigerian Youths' Self-disclosure Inclination

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ABSTRACT This study made use of 600 subjects (age 19-25 years) drawn from six Nigerian Universities to investigate the extent to which Nigerian youths are inclined to self disclose, the range of significant others (Breadth) to whom they are prepared to self disclose, and the disclosure depth to which they are susceptible (Depth). In testing the three hypotheses that derived from the above research objectives, three conclusions emerged namely that; Nigerian Youths display a high level of self-disclosure tendency, freely disclose to significant others and are ready to disclose intimate issues. Significant gender disparity was evident at the levels of measurement.

INTRODUCTION

Self disclosure is a potential attribute that determines the level of social competence in any given social interactant. Relationship development includes exchange of self-disclosures as partners come to know each other better and it increases liking and offers opportunities for sympathetic supportive responses. Self-disclosures, according to Morton (1978) include facts about one's life and situation, as well as inner thoughts, feelings and emotions. It is understood that both the depth of self-disclosure, i.e. the level of intimacy, and the breadth; i.e. the range of topics, increase as a relationship develop (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Rubin *et al.*, 1980).

In the international web of social encounters, the extent to which an individual is ready to self-disclose determines the possible depth of closeness between him and the recipient of such confidences. Because in the real sense of the word, intimate self disclosure is nothing more than an exchange of confidences. Hence, disclosing something about oneself makes both friends and strangers like one another more. This may explain why sales people often tell their customers cute stories about their kids. And

may also explain why people who readily express their feelings verbally are liked more than less expressive individuals (Friedman *et al.* 1988). This, however, is not to say that self-disclosing cannot go too far. It definitely can so do, particularly when an individual chooses to disclose more than is appropriate for the intimacy level of the relationship. This will make others involved in the relationship quite uncomfortable and therefore induce dislike (Wortman *et al.*, 1976).

When people are entrusted with a self-disclosure, the norm of reciprocity prescribes that they should respond in kind (Smith & Mackie, 1995). For this reason, self-disclosure, like rewards are often exchanged in a relationship as people try to maintain balance or equity. Berg and Acher (1980) found that a listener who responds with sympathetic concern to an intimate self-disclosure is liked better than one who simply reciprocates with a self-disclosure. Because confidences are capable of eliciting sympathy and support, self-disclosure leads to self-validation, i.e. the warm feeling of being truly known and accepted by the listener.

It has been discovered, however, that strong gender difference exists in the intimacy level of self-disclosure. Women are believed to self-disclose more than men, particularly, by revealing their feelings and emotions (Morton, 1978 & Dindia & Allen, 1992). This difference is more noticeable in same-sex friendships; i.e. women disclose much more to other women than men do to other men (Reis, 1986). Also, when men do engage in self disclosure early in a heterosexual relationship, it can be part of an effort to make the relationship more intimate (Darlepa *et al.*, 1985). In contrast, women's disclosures seem to reflect their existing feelings about the relationship, rather than their intention to move

toward greater intimacy (Adams & Shee, 1981).

In a study carried out by Youniss and Ketterlinus (1987), attempt was made to validate and expand on an important finding regarding adolescents' relationship with their parents. It was discovered that adolescents make sharp distinctions between their mothers and fathers in terms of what they talked about, how they spent their free times and how they settle disputes. Arising from this study were such findings that describe mothers as more open to listen to problems and help clarify feelings than fathers were. Fathers appear to take a limited view of their sons and daughters insofar as they choose to emphasize some aspects of their lives such as future and getting along with peer groups (Hunter, 1985; Youniss and Smoller, 1985).

In another aspect of the study, adolescents were asked to estimate how well their mothers and fathers knew them. This same subjects were asked to rate how much attention they pay to what their mothers and fathers thought about them. There is also the assumption that questions about how well parents know adolescents might offer an interesting measure of communication patterns. This assumption is anchored on the belief that knowledge of persons is constructed through communicative interactions (Youniss, 1980).

Findings from the above study reveal that sons and daughters alike care a lot about what their parents think of them as persons, more so than the extent to which they judge that their parents know them as persons. Daughters judged that their mothers know them better than their fathers knew them. This result complements the reports that adolescent daughters talk more and talk more openly with their mothers than with their fathers. Daughters presume that their fathers might either be disinterested or judgmental should they reveal what they are really thinking or feeling.

Insofar as disclosing problems permit a person to be known, it is suggested that daughters expose themselves to mothers while they remain hidden from their fathers (Burke and Weir, 1979; Wright & Keple, 1981).

In another study carried out by Lombardo and Wood (1979), at the New York State University,

Male and Female Undergraduates (N = 96) were divided into groups of high, moderate, and low disclosers, and were asked to indicate the extent to which they felt included in the activities of others; their satisfaction with their romantic relationships. Results indicated that moderate disclosers of both sexes expressed the most satisfaction with their interpersonal relations. The results, according to the researchers, suggest that self-disclosure may not be related to adjustment or maladjustment but rather to the stability of a persons interpersonal relations.

From the foregoing review of literature, researchers have been able to confirm that self disclosure induces self validation (Archer, 1980), that women are more predisposed to disclose more than men (Morton, 1978 and Dindia and Allen, 1892), that there is a pattern to self disclose among adult men and women. That is, when men disclose in a heterosexual relationship, they do so in an effort to make a relationship intimate. Whereas the content of what women disclose reflect their existing feelings about the ongoing relationship. Also that adolescent prefer disclosing to their mothers rather than their fathers (Youniss and Ketterlinus, 1987).

In order to extend the frontier of knowledge in self-disclosure attribute, the study is set to test the following hypotheses.

Hypotheses Tested

1. That subjects (Youths) shall not display any significant attribute of self disclosure.
2. That apparent gender differentiation shall derive from the breadth (i.e. the range of significant others subject are ready to confide in) of subjects' disclosure pattern.
3. That subjects shall significantly betray gender biases in the depth (i.e. the level of confidence they are ready to volunteer) of subject matter to be disclosed.

METHODOLOGY

Design

The study design shall essentially be survey and comparative in mode.

Subject

University undergraduates between the ages of 19 and 25 years constitute the subject of the study. Six hundred (600) samples were randomly drawn from the target population. Of this number, 320 were male while 280 were female. The locale of study was Southwestern Nigeria.

Instrument

A self Disclosure questionnaire (SDQ) developed by Jourard and Lasakow (1958) was adapted and used as the main psychological instrument by which data were collected from respondents.

The questionnaire in its adapted form comprised 30 question items, all of which were framed in a way to make them reflect the Nigerian Socio-cultural environment. The applicability of the test to the Nigerian subjects was ascertained through a six week test re-test reliability, from which a coefficient of $r = 0.65$ was obtained. To validate the questionnaire, a jury sampling that spanned experts from cognate research focus area was conducted and a positive consensus was obtained in the direction that the instrument can measure what it purports to measure (92% agreement).

Data Analysis

T-test statistical analysis and simple percentages were employed to determine the level of gender comparison in the study.

RESULT

In testing the first hypothesis which states that subjects shall not display any significant attribute of self disclosure, the following results were obtained from the data analysis of the criterion measure used. 86% of the subjects have engaged and are still involved in the habit of self disclosing, while only 13.3% confessed to negative self disclosure habit. Also, the data was analysed to see the gender outlay of subjects' tendency to self disclose. Even though, a non-significant difference ($t = 0.24$, $p < .05$) existed

between the overall readiness of both male and female subjects to self disclose, female subjects showed more eagerness to self disclose. The results are presented in tables 1, 2 and 3 (See the appendix).

Table 1 attests to the fact that 86.6% compared with 13.39% constitute a significant percentage of the total. Table 2 also shows an overall mean score of 70.00 and 69.07 respectively for both male and female subjects on a scale in which the highest possible was 85. And table 3 presented a mean biserial pattern of subjects detail response to the variables presented with the above results, the first hypothesis is rejected.

The second hypothesis states that apparent gender differentiation shall derive from the breadth (i.e. the range of significant other subjects are ready to confide in) of subjects' disclosure pattern. In testing this hypothesis, the data collected was analysed and the following results as are presented in table 4 (see the appendix) were obtained.

The above table presents a pattern that underlines an overlap in the significant - others that subjects choose to disclose to at any particular point in time. Even given this finding, evident gender disparity still emerged. To this end, therefore, the second hypothesis is upheld because female subjects, going by their scale weighting, are more prone to self disclosing than their male counterparts. Both sexes disclose better to friends than to their parents. Also, females disclose more to their mothers than to their fathers or than males do to their fathers and mothers.

The third hypothesis which states that subjects shall betray gender differences in the depth (i.e. the level of confidences they are ready to volunteer) of subject matter they are willing to disclose at any point in time was tested and the following results were obtained.

Table 5 reveals a pattern that shows differences along gender lines. For this reason, therefore, the hypothesis is upheld. The most

Table 1: Percentage level of self disclosers

No	Positive Self Disclosers	Non Self Disclosers	Total
600	86.6%	13.3%	100%

Table 2: Overall gender outlay of readiness to self disclose

Variable	Level	N	X	SD	t	P
Readiness to Self Disclose	Male	320	70.00	16.33	0.24	< 0.05 N.S

Table 3: Mean biserial performance of subjects on the self disclosure measuring scale (SDQ)

Var.	Dis- clo- se in Full De- tails	Fa- ther	Mo- ther	Close Fri- end	Just Any- body	No- body	(b) Dis- close in few Details to	Fa- ther	Mo- ther	Close Fri- ends	Just Any- body	No- body	(c) Dis- close nothing About it to	Fa- ther	Mo- ther	Close Fri- end	Just Any- body	No- body
Male		5.00	5.38	7.00	2.15	0.70	Male	3.00	3.15	7.64	2.72	1.54	Male	4.11	2.72	3.45	8.565	11.17
Female		6.30	8.78	9.68	1.92	1.52	Female	3.56	3.37	7.15	2.92	0.80	Female	4.00	3.11	4.37	11.56	13.75

revealing finding however, is the readiness of female subjects to significantly disclose issues in full details to their mothers and more males were willing to disclose in full details to their mothers than were ready to disclose in full details to their fathers. Another instructive revelation is that 82% of males and 85% of females would, rather than not disclose nothing to nobody, prefer

to so do to somebody whether in full or few details. This immediately confirms the fact that subjects possess a tendency that significantly predisposes them to want to self disclose.

Disclosure of Findings

The three hypotheses tested in this study focus attention on the pattern of self disclosure tendency (level, breadth and depth) in Nigerian Youths. As was stated in the literature, self disclosure ability facilitates relationship development and it increases liking and offers opportunities for sympathetic supportive responses. For this reason, it becomes a particularly important index of social competence where it is pro-socially indulged in.

Ability to confide in people, ask for advice and opinions, share worries, build hopes, exchange experiences etc. takes man several steps away from an animal. When nursing their young, animals would confront any potential danger to the offspring headlong, but after weaning, animals face life all alone.

In rejecting the first hypothesis, it was discovered that the ability and the readiness to self disclose are significantly expressed by Nigerian Youths. A contrary finding would have been highly unusual when considered against the background that the Nigerian society is built on the foundation of an elaborate family setting. At the micro level, children are trained to depend on parents to satisfy basic needs, and on peers to satisfy social needs. Expectedly, the satis-

Table 4: Self disclosure pattern of subjects (Breadth)

Variables	Male (N = 320)	Female (N = 280)
<i>Disclosure to</i>		
1. Father	64.25%	80.25%
2. Mother	68.25%	95.03%
3. Close Friends	86.05%	96.05%
4. Just Anybody	27.05%	24.05%
5. Nobody	11.25%	19.05%

Table 5: Self Disclosure Patterns of Subjects (Depth)

Breadth (Range)	Disclose in Full Detail	Disclose in Few Detail	Tell Nothing about it
Father	Male 43%	22%	35%
	Female 46%	25%	28%
Mother	Male 47%	28%	24%
	Female 57%	22%	22%
Close Friends	Male 38%	43%	19%
	Female 46%	33%	21%
Just Anybody	Male 16%	20%	64%
	Female 12%	18%	70%
Nobody	Male 07%	11%	82%
	Female 10%	05%	85%

faction of these needs would give way to a - do - it - yourself kind of independence later in life. By then the presence and the role of the significant others would have been established. The family and other developmental institutions then become training posts for a virile self-disclosure habit. An absolutely non-self-disclosing individual at this level would be suspected and indeed be guilty of self effacement and be considered introverted.

This study has further been able to establish a two-dimensional pattern to self-disclosure attribute, one is the breadth and the other is the depth. Hypothesis two proposed a gender differentiation in the range of significant - others youths are ready to confide in breadth, and the finding justifies this proposition. Being able to self disclose in itself is not sufficient, particularly when the choice is fixed without variation. For example, if an individual is fixated on self-disclosing to either of the two parents only, problems might arise when growth and age would mandate that the individual live far apart from his favorite parent confidant. Also, the sudden death of such a parent may deal the discloser more than an ordinary social blow.

The ability to self-disclose across a range of significant - others suggests a social adaptability that enhances in the individual the opportunity to adjust, even in strange environments by making friend, building trust and encouraging intimate relationship. Gender disparity, however, exists in a significant way in the self disclosure pattern of youths across breadth. Females were better disclosers except that they are less ready to self-disclose to just anybody than the males. But whether to fathers, mothers, or close friend, more females than males were willing to self-disclose (See table 3). This outcome would probably find a good reason in the pattern of upbringing and focus of training received by male and female youths in their developmental years.

It is pertinent to note that this training encourages the kind of expectation that inspires independence of action in males and dependence in females. Even as socially facilitating as self-disclosure habit is, the African cultural sex stereotype considers it rather effeminate and a betrayal of weakness if a man makes it a habit to self-disclose indiscriminately. Also the innate

tendency for male to be more achievement prone may account for the gender disparity found in the breadth of youths self-disclosure pattern in this study.

A socially desirable self disclosure habit does not just thrive in variation across breadth alone but is equally determined by the depth of what is disclosed. Casual disclosers would makes casual friends while deep disclosures stand a good chance of making deep and intimate friends. Hypothesis three was tested to confirm the presence of this attribute in the subject of this study. The finding confirms that depth disclosure comes easily to the subjects. Females were found to disclose in general detail rather intimate issues that cover a wide range of subjects to; father, mother and close friend than males. But males more than females disclose in fewer detail to mother and close friend than to father. It is also interesting to note that while 16% of male subjects were ready to self disclose in detail to strangers, only 12% of the female subjects were ready to do so.

These findings, incidentally, are not unexpected, because the cultural stereotype that underlies the upbringing of male and female children, role expectation and social obligation in the African cultural context suggest an outcome in this direction. The moment a child is old enough to learn sex roles and differentiate between the sexes of the two parents, he would strive to align his role, through modeling, with the same-sex parent. This may account for the reason why 57% of the female sexes are prepared to disclose in detail to their mother.

CONCLUSION

The outcome of this study has been able to confirm that Nigerian youths possess in sufficient socially desirable quantity the level of competence required to operate a healthy interpersonal social relationship. Evidences obtained also confirm that Nigerian Youths can disclose conveniently to a range of significant others, and are also found to be adequate depth disclosers.

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