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Trust in Friendship: A Comparative Analysis of Male and Female University Students

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Abstract

Past literature highlight that trust; a basis for friendship differs in male and female same sex friendships. Female friendships have found to be more therapeutic and emotionally intimate, so it can be hypothesized that females would have more trust in same sex friendships. Literature in this regard exists only from researches conducted in the western countries. This area has not been extensively explored by researchers in the east. So the current study aimed to examine gender differences in trust in male and female same sex friendships. It was hypothesized that trust will be higher in female same sex friendships than in male same sex friendships. It was also hypothesized that there is relationship between trust and friendship, and further it was hypothesized that gender differences exist in friendship. Cross sectional research design was used to conduct the present study. In order to collect data, multistage sampling technique was used. Five universities were randomly drawn from the list of government and private universities in Lahore. Further six departments were randomly drawn from each of these five universities. Later 40 male and 40 female students were included in the study through purposive sampling technique from the randomly selected six departments of all five universities. To measure trust, Rempel and Holmes Trust scale (1985) was used. Cronbach's alpha revealed a reliability of $\alpha = .77$. Friendship was measured by using friendship questionnaire, by Carroll (2002). Cronbach's alpha revealed a reliability of $\alpha = .77$ for the current study sample. Results were analyzed by using SPSS (version 11.5). To analyze the data, *t*-test and Pearson product moment correlation were applied. Study highlighted that female have more trust in their same sex friends as compared to males. Positive correlation between trust and friendship was found, but no difference was found on friendship between male and females.

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate differences in trust between male and female same sex friendships. Friendship is a multifaceted social phenomenon that is an integral part of socialization. Socialization process starts at the time of birth, and ends at death. Need for gregariousness is a secondary motive which leads people towards making friendships and increasing their social circle, for multiple reasons like sharing, enjoying company and above all getting emotional comfort.

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Friendship has been defined and reviewed from various angles by different researchers. Connor, (1992) defined friendship as an internal need for both genders and tendency to rely on someone (as cited in Carroll, 2002). Carroll, (2002) stated that friendship is a basic need of human nature. Another narrative by Turner, (2002) is that a close friend is someone to trust, to enjoy another's company, and to share life's experiences. Gender differences in type of shared activities in friendship do exist. Elkins and Peterson (1993) found that males share their physical activities with their friends, whereas females discuss personal, emotional and at times intimate issues.

Friendship and trust are closely related constructs. No relationship can survive if trust is missing. Friendship can only grow due to trust. According to Rotter, (1967) to have confidence in the ability of another is called trust. Lewis and Weigert, (1985) found that the key to positive interpersonal relationships in various settings is trust because it is central to how we interact with others.

Gender differences exist in level of trust in male and female friendships. Males have found to be less trusting in their friendships. Murray (1999) explained this difference, that when males reach adolescence they try to adopt neutral sex role and to become less feminine they replace trust with mistrust. Carroll, (2002) discussed that female same-sex friendships have more trust than male same-sex friendships.

Clark, (2002) also did research on similar topic and found that women have more intimate friendships with other women than men do with other men. Jones and Wood, (1990) did research on the relationships among sex, sex role orientation, and friendship. Results from their study indicated that close friends tended to be of same sex, females had more close friends overall than did the males. Riesman, (1990) discussed that females are more disclosing in their same-sex friendships than are males. No support was found for the suggestion that males feel just as close to their same-sex friends as do females.

Turner, (2002) tried to investigate if there was difference in trust between female and male same-sex friendships, their study also concluded the fact that more trust exists in female same-sex friendships than male same-sex friendships.

Various theories exist regarding trust and its development. Fukuyama (1995) developed a theory of trust that reveals that societies who have low levels of trust in voluntary associations will have low-levels of non-kin interaction, while those with high-levels of non-kin interaction will have high levels of trust in voluntary associations (as cited in Brewster, 1998). Fukuyama also emphasized that the amount of trust in non-kin relationships (friendships) is ultimately the key to the progress of large corporations. So the importance of studying this construct cannot be undermined, and need is to study trust in non-kin interactions if we want to

gain a macro level understanding for it. With the measurement of trust in nations, one can then evaluate the levels of trust in any society and the magnitude of that nation's economic corporations.

The importance of trust at micro level cannot be ignored as well, as friendship has been considered a key element of a healthier life for thousands of years (Aristotle, 330 B.C.E./1951; Bolotin, 1979). People having strong trusting friendships have greater social support and hence better quality of life (Craddock, 1996; Newsom & Schulz, 1996; Lunsky & Benson, 2001). Student life is a transitory period in which students need to discuss their issues with friends rather than family members (Tokuno, 1983), and trusting friends help buffer the stress associated with this transitional period (Brooks, 2002; Oswald & Clark, 2003).

To conclude it can be said that the significance of two constructs friendship and trust have been undermined and neglected areas of research worldwide. Friendship develops through the process of socialization so its pattern, and development process can vary from society to society. All literature regarding these constructs is currently available from researches conducted in the west. So the current study was designed to analyze whether same results are found in our population, regarding difference in trust within female same sex friendship and male same sex friendships. In light of the existing literature following hypotheses were proposed for current research.

Hypothesis 1: Level of trust is higher in female same sex friendships then in male same sex friendships.

Hypothesis 2: There is relationship between trust and friendship.

Hypothesis 3: There is difference in friendship between male and females.

Methodology

Sampling strategy

In the current research multistage sampling was used. Five universities were randomly taken from the list of government and private universities in Lahore. Further six departments were randomly drawn from these five universities. A total of 80 students of different government and private universities (40 males and 40 females) were enrolled in the study through purposive sampling technique. Male and female muslim students, having a monthly family income of 30,000 rupees or more, enrolled for bachelors and master program, age ranged between 18-25 years were included in the sample (as it is inferred that friendship patterns may be associated with social factors like socioeconomic status as well as religious beliefs, cultural norms and values).

Instruments

Demographic Questionnaire: The researcher devised a short questionnaire to gather demographic information from the subjects

including, studying in a government/ private university, studying in bachelors or masters program, type of living urban/rural living, currently living in hostel or at home etc.

Trust was measured by using Rempel and Holmes Trust scale (1985) it consisted of 18 items that asked for the participant to use a specific person, a best or close friend, to assist them in deciding their answers to the questions that measured trust in male and female friendships on a five point, likert-type scale. The scale gives a sense of tendency to trust by adding scores from questions 1, 2, 4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 14, and 17, and then adding the reversed scored keyed items: 3, 5, 6, 8, 12, 13, 15, 16, and 18. The scale is from 1-5 where 1=Strongly Agree, 2 = Mildly Agree, 3= Agree and Disagree Equally, 4= Mildly Disagree and 5= Strongly Disagree. Scoring is done by summing the ratings assigned to all the items after reverse scoring the positively worded items. Cronbach's alpha revealed reliability for the study sample to be .82.

Friendship was measured by using 11 item friendship questionnaires (Carroll, 2002), in this questionnaire general questions were asked from the participants like, how many friends they have and how much they trust them, criteria for choosing a female friend as well as shared activities done with female/ male friends. Its reliability was found to be .71 for the study sample.

Procedure

Data was collected from different government and private universities in Lahore. Name of five universities were randomly selected from the list of government and private universities in Lahore. Later six departments were randomly drawn from each of these five universities. Institutional consent from the chairpersons / chairman's of these departments was sought before data collection. Two students from every department were recruited through purposive sampling technique. Individual written consent was taken from students who showed their interest to participate in the study. Confidentiality procedures were carefully explained verbally as well as mentioned in the written consent form. Brief summary of the research project was told to those students who were willing to participate in the study. The students after filling the demographic form completed the friendship questionnaire and trust scale. Both tests were administered in English. Questionnaires were quantitatively configured and scores were obtained. The SPSS software version 11.5 was used to analyze the data. Independent sample *t*- test was used to find difference in trust in male and female friendships. Pearson Product Moment was used to find the relationship between friendship and trust.

Results

Descriptive statistics were calculated for the study sample. These statistics revealed that 69.0% students were studying in government universities, whereas 31.0% were from private universities. 78.8% students were enrolled in Bachelors program and 21.2% were enrolled in Masters Program. 66.3% belonged from the urban and 33.7 % from rural background. 72.5% were day scholars and 17.5% were residing in the university hostels whereas 10% were living in some private hostels. 42.5% of the respondents belonged from families having joint family system where as 57.5% were from nuclear family system. 89.6% of the study participants had four or more siblings and 10.4% had less than three siblings. 78.0% of these participants had 9 or more household members whereas 22.0% had 6 or less than 6 household members. 70.1% of the respondents were local residents of Lahore city and remaining 29.9% were living out of Lahore. 2% of these students had both parents working, 37.5 % students had one earning member in the family whereas 60.5% had two or more earning family members.

The two groups were compared using independent sample t-tests. Results are shown in tables below.

Table1

Differences in trust scores of male and female students

	M	SD	df	t	p
Male	79.0250	16.29140	78	-3.426	.001
Female	94.4500	23.35012			

Table 1 represents the results from independent sample t-test, indicating that there is a significant difference in trust scores for males ($M=79.025$, $SD=16.2914$), and females ($M=94.450$, $SD=23.3501$, $t(78) = -3.42$, $p=.001$). Thus the results confirm the main hypothesis of the research that trust is higher in female same sex friendships then in male same sex friendships.

Table 2

Correlation between friendship and Trust (N=80)

	N	r	p
Trust Friendship	80	.686**	.000

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results in table 2 ($r = .686$, $p < .01$) indicate that there is a significant positive correlation between trust and friendship proving the second hypothesis of this research.

Table 3

Differences in Friendship Scores for Male and Female Students

	M	SD	df	t	p
Male (n = 40)	24.8750	4.26787	78	-1.78	.07
Female (n = 40)	26.3750	3.15974			

Table 3 represents the results from independent sample t-test, indicating that there is no significant difference in friendship scores for males ($M=24.875$, $SD =4.2678$), and females students ($M=26.375$, $SD=3.1597$, $t (78) = -1.78$, $p=.07$). Third hypothesis of the research is not supported.

Discussion

The purpose of present study was to find difference in trust between males and females in their same-sex friendships. Data was collected from various Departments of government and private universities in Lahore. The main objective was to compare whether female same sex friendships have more trust as compared to the male same sex friendships. Overall result from the study show that female same sex friendships have more trust, then male same sex friendships.

It was hypothesized that there is difference in trust in male and female same sex friendships. Score on trust scale for males was ($M=79.025$, $SD =16.2914$), and that for females was ($M=94.450$, $SD=23.3501$, $t (78) = -3.42$, $p<.05$). Results were found to be statistically significant. The findings suggested that female same sex friends have more trust among themselves then male same sex friends. These findings are consistent with previous researches (Floyd, 1995; Miller, 1983). Carroll (2002) conducted a comparative research on the male and female friends to find out the level of trust in friendship. The results from his study showed that more trust is found in female same sex friendships. Similar findings were reported by (Cark, 2002; Turner 2002; Jones & Wood, 1990; Roy, Benenson, & Lilly, 2000).

Riesman, (1990) found that female's are more disclosing of their feelings and problems than are males to their friends. Although males do wish to be more disclosing, they expect to be more open mainly in opposite-sex friendships. The majority of adults profess little concern about disclosure in same-sex friendships, but women report feeling more at ease in relating to other women than to men.

The second hypothesis of this research is that there is relationship between friendship and trust ($r =.686$, $p<.01$), results of the study indicate that there is a significant positive correlation between trust and friendship.

As without trust friendships cannot develop (Elkins, & Peterson, 1993)

The third sub hypothesis of the study that friendship will be significantly different in male and females. Mean and standard deviation for males was ($M=24.875$, $SD =4.2678$), and female students, ($M=26.375$, $SD=3.1597$, $t(78) = -1.78$, $p>.05$). The results of the study were not found to be statistically significant, revealing no difference in friendship scores across gender was found. Similar results have been reported by studies conducted in west (Yaughn & Nowicki, 1999; Floyd, 1995).

This study has numerous implications as an important study on gender differences regarding two important constructs; friendship and trust. The study helps us to understand why men differ from women in their friendship patterns and interactions. It further highlights the fact that as men have less trust in same sex friendships they involve themselves in activities that require less trust, like sports, instrumental activities and other extracurricular activities (Elkins & Peterson, 1993). This highlights, why male same sex friendships are less emotionally therapeutic and psychologically supportive in nature. So with this knowledge that men have less trust in friendships than women, we can find ways to build trust in male friendships. Trust building can ultimately lead to a better quality of friendships in men; they can seek emotional and therapeutic benefits from friendships just like females (Elkins & Peterson, 1993)

The current study sample employed student population, so it can be concluded that if trust is build in male students as far as same sex friendships are concerned they can ultimately get catharsis, emotional support and relationship satisfaction from their friends, during the most demanding developmental and career building stage of their life. As friendship can be source of social support and self disclosure (Weisz & Wood, 2005) male students can relieve themselves from much of the stressors, anxiety, loneliness and depression associated with difficulties faced during students life, by developing trust in their same sex friendships and getting a more rewarding interpersonal relationship. Social support has found to have health buffering effects, and the health profits of social support in social relationships like friendships are now well recognized (Cohen, 1992; Cohen & Syme, 1985; Kessler & McLeod, 1985). Friendships in which there is strong element of trust can enhance healthy personality functioning (Connor, 1992). Friendship is associated with companionship (Rook, 1995). Companionship increases well-being by providing a positive effect on mood, which decreases stress levels. The elevated mood experienced when with friends decreases the negative effects of every day hassles (Rook, 1987). So if trust could be enhanced in same sex male friendships; the friendships could be made more supportive, therapeutic and can inculcate healthy personality functioning as well as buffer the negative effects of every day hassles in a student's life.

Certain limitations need to be discussed. Only student population was included in the study so the results of the study cannot be generalized to other populations like married men or older male population. Likewise the students enrolled in the study were muslims and belonged from families with monthly family income of at least 30,000 so the study results cannot be generalized to other socioeconomic classes (religion and family socioeconomic status can affect friendships). Further research is needed to see how trust forms and how it develops more in female same sex friendships as compared to male same sex friendship in context to our culture.

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