

Emotional Understanding's Effects on Self-Disclosure in Same and Cross-Sex Friendships

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COMM-210-100: Interpersonal Communication

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November 23, 2020

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Self-disclosure is an important factor in any lasting and healthy friendship. Though it is an important part of friendships, self-disclosure is something that can sometimes be hard for many people to do. There are many reasons why self-disclosure can be hard for people and one is that people do not even know what they need to disclose. Understanding one's self and one's own emotions is vital to good and effective self-disclosure. How are people able to fully disclose their emotions if they do not even know what they are feeling? Looking at one's emotions, understanding those emotions, and then learning how to properly communicate and disclose those emotions to friends will lead to lasting friendships. This discussion sets out to see how people learn to understand their emotions to then better communicate those emotions to their friends. This discussion will look at two types of friendships, same-sex and cross-sex, and how emotional understanding and disclosure affect them.

Understanding One's Self and One's Emotions

Learned Emotional Understanding

Emotional understanding is not always easy, and it takes time and practice to understand emotions. During the early years of childhood, children start to learn about their emotions and the emotions of the people around them. Familial experience plays a major part in how people perceive their emotions and the way they read and understand the emotions of the people that they interact with. Nixon and Watson (2001) looked at a group of children with seemingly no learning disabilities and found that children were better at understanding emotions, expressing their emotions, and hiding certain emotions when they had parents with good marital communication skills.

It is important to note that learning disabilities can affect the way children learn and understand their emotions as well as how they disclose those emotions. Though children with learning disabilities are not completely in the dark about emotions, many of them do struggle for most of their lives with communicating with others because they are not fully capable of understanding other people's emotions. Bauminger et al. (2005) found in their study that though children with learning disabilities were able to understand some emotions like happiness, they had a harder time understanding more complex emotions. It is vital to understand that every child is different when it comes to their capability to learn, but there is also scientific proof that children begin to learn at some level the idea of emotions by being exposed to their parents or caretakers.

Emotional Identity

Emotional understanding can allow people to understand who they are. People have a lot of different emotions and understanding all of those emotions and why they have those emotions can allow them to better understand themselves. People experimenting with their emotions in a variety of settings can allow them to see themselves and who they want to be. Becker and Stamp (2005) discuss how many people use impression management in chat rooms to experiment with their many identities to try to better understand themselves and their emotions as a whole. Experimenting and finding out who people are can allow them to better represent themselves and their emotions to others in their lives like their friends.

Emotional Understanding in Friendship Disclosure

Most friendships, at least close friendships, rely heavily on emotional connection and openness. After coming to terms with and understanding one's own emotions, people will then be allowed to open up with their friends to gain a closer relationship. It is hard to truly be as

close to friends as most would like if there is not emotional communication going on between both individuals. Leaper (2019) says that being open about one's feelings with a friend and having that friend listen and sympathize allows for a deeper and more bonded friendship that helps with both people's physical and mental wellbeing. Knowing that someone is there when friends need to open up about their emotions is very important because that means there is someone for them to lean on, helping them emotionally through their issues. There are different types of friendships that have varying degrees of openness and closeness. The two categories that friendships can fall under are same-sex (male-male or female-female) and cross-sex (male-female). Both of these categories have stark differences and similarities in the ways that people in these friendships disclose their emotions to one another and listen to one another to gain closer friendships.

Emotional Disclosure in Same-Sex Friendships

The Prominence of Same-Sex Friendships

When thinking about both types of friendships, it is important to know which is more prominent and why. There are some factors like age that can have a sway over the prominence of the two types of friendships. Johnson (2004) found that there are many more same-sex friendships during childhood and adolescence than cross-sex friendships. This can be because males understand what other males are going through during the early years of childhood and the same goes for females. Kito (2005) found that more people were open with their emotions and responses when they were in same-sex friendships than in cross-sex friendships. This may be linked to both sexes being afraid to be judged by the other. Adolescents worry about being judged, so it is understandable why they would be afraid to have many cross-sex friendships. Same-sex friendships during childhood can also be linked to many adults placing a stigma on

children to be a part of gendered groups like when young females join the softball team and young males join the baseball team. Both sexes seem to have more interaction with those of the same sex when they are younger.

Emotional Disclosure in Same-Sex Friendships Based on Gender

Unlike cross-sex friendships, there are two branches of friendships attached to same-sex friendships, male-male and female-female. There are varying degrees of emotional disclosure and friendship success in both of these types of friendships. Leaper (2019) found that females in same-sex friendships rated their friendships more open and less conflictive than males in same-sex friendships. Females talked about more personal emotions than males did with each other. Males' lack of emotional openness may be caused by the stigma of males expressing emotions. The conflict in male-male friendships may be due to a lack of communication and openness with one another about their emotions. Johnson (2004) found that female same-sex friendships also were more committed to their friendships than male same-sex friendships. This drive to make their friendships work might be why females self-disclose more about themselves and their emotions because they may want to be as open about their emotions as possible to keep that connection.

Emotional Disclosure in Cross-Sex Friendships

The Prominence of Cross-Sex Friendships

Though same-sex friendships are more prominent during childhood and young adult years, cross-sex friendships become more present as children grow into adults. Johnson (2004) found that it seems people bond with those of the opposite sex as they get older. This may be because some people are heterosexual and are experimenting with dating and romantic relationships. It can also be that people are simply getting to experience more with the opposite

sex because of their jobs or their college experiences. All in all, it does seem to be more likely to find more cross-sex friendships in adulthood than in childhood.

Levels of Disclosure and Intimacy in Cross-Sex Friendships

There have been many studies done to see the differences in disclosure and intimacy levels in same and cross-sex friendships. Kito (2005) found that people in cross-sex friendships tend to emotionally disclose less than those in same-sex friendships, specifically female-female friendships. Kito (2005) hypothesized that it could be because some people in cross-sex friendships might be afraid to give off the wrong impression because they may want something more intimate out of the relationship than just friendship. Johnson (2004) also says that most adolescents in cross-sex friendships tend to not be as supportive and close as those in same-sex friendships. This could be because they do not have the same basic understanding of each other based on their different sexes. Most young females do not understand what it is like to be young males and vice versa. It can be hard to fully understand the other sex's emotions when both sexes do not process emotions the same way.

Further Questions and Research

Though there has been much research done discussing how the understanding of one's emotions affects self-disclosure in friendships, there is still more research that needs to be done to fill in the gaps of the previously mentioned studies. Research has shown that understanding one's emotions can have a major impact on the way friends communicate, and different types of friendships like same and cross-sex friendships communicate differently. There is evidence that early childhood experiences can affect self-disclosure in both types of friendships as well as people's mental capability to perceive and understand emotions. With all of this information, there is still one question that is not deeply discussed in these studies. Do all cultural

backgrounds affect the way friends communicate with one another? If all cultural backgrounds affect friendships, which cultures are more compatible and open with one another in friendships? Studies would have to be conducted on friendships with people of different cultures to see if cultures affect emotional disclosure and which cultures are more compatible. Though there is a large amount of research on what affects emotional disclosure in friendships, there is further research that must be done to fully understand why people disclose emotions to others differently in both same and cross-sex friendships.

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