

Self-Disclosure and Listener Verbal Support in Same-Gender and Cross-Gender Friends' Conversations¹

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Self-disclosure and listener support were examined in conversations between same-gender and cross-gender friends. Participants were university students (mean age = 19 years) from mostly middle-class European-American backgrounds. Each pair of friends was asked to discuss how their relationships with their respective families had changed since entering college. Self-disclosures and listener verbal responses were coded from transcripts of the taped conversations. Coded listener responses ranged in how explicitly they acknowledged and supported the friend's disclosure. The Kraemer-Jacklin statistic was used to test for speaker gender, partner gender, and interaction effects: First, contrary to expectation, men made more disclosures than did women. Second, clarification questions were more likely in response to disclosures from male friends than female friends. Finally, women used more active understanding responses with female friends than did women with male friends, men with female friends, or men with male friends. Taken together, the results highlight ways in which women and men may express intimacy and show support differently depending on both the speaker's gender and the partner's gender.

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The sharing of personal thoughts and feelings is a form of social comparison that fosters self-exploration, self-clarification, and open communication in relationships (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; Prager, Fuller, & Gonzalez, 1989; Sullivan, 1953; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Accordingly, researchers have characterized self-disclosure as a process that leads to the formation of intimate relationships (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Camarena, Sarigiani, & Petersen, 1990; Sullivan, 1953). Moreover, self-disclosure is a significant predictor of socioemotional adjustment (Buhrmester, 1990; Mikulincer & Nachschon, 1991; Rotenberg & Whiteny, 1992) and relationship satisfaction (Hendrick, 1981; Reisman, 1990) among both adolescents and adults.

Gender is one of the factors that appears related to individual differences in self-disclosure (see Dindia & Allen, 1992; Hill & Stull, 1987, for reviews). Dindia and Allen's (1992) recent meta-analysis of 205 research studies indicated a trend for women to disclose more than men although the overall effect size was small ($d = .18$). However, the effect size was stronger if the target listener was a female ($d = .35$) compared to a male ($d = .00$). Thus, based on Dindia and Allen's (1992) meta-analysis and other narrative reviews (Hill & Stull, 1987; Winstead, 1986), partner gender is an important moderator of speaker gender effects on self-disclosure. Specifically, it appears that self-disclosures are more likely when two women are talking than when two men or a man and a woman are talking.

It has been suggested that men may be less expressive with their male friends out of concerns that they will appear weak (Aries, 1987; Lewis, 1978; Sattel, 1983; Winstead, 1986) or homosexual (Lewis, 1978; Winstead, 1986). Although these explanations may have merit, they do not account for why women are also less likely to disclose with male than female targets. One possibility is that male and female listeners tend to react differently to self-disclosures. In particular, many men may learn to avoid emotional intimacy because they do not get support for it from their male friends. This interpretation would account for the finding that men disclose more to female than male partners (Hill & Stull, 1987). Research looking more generally at adolescents' and adults' conversational behavior supports this interpretation. According to these studies, women are more likely than men to demonstrate active listening and to make supportive comments (see Aries, 1987; Burleson, 1982; Maltz &orker, 1982; Marche & Peterson, 1993; McLaughlin, Cody, Kane, & Robey, 1981; West & Zimmerman, 1985; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). By extension, it may be that women's responses to self-disclosures are more supportive than men's responses. However, conversational processes related to listener support have not been specifically examined in self-disclosure settings. This research topic is especially pertinent given the communication difficulties between the sexes that are

widely reported in both the popular and the empirical literature (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1988; Tannen, 1990). Thus, one of the major aims of the present study was to investigate speaker gender and partner gender effects on listeners' responses to self-disclosures.

In order to examine gender differences in self-disclosure and listener support. Dindia and Allen's (1992) meta-analysis found that gender differences tended to be more likely when the research participants were friends ($d = .28$) compared to when they were strangers ($d = .07$). Studying friends as opposed to strangers has greater external validity because self-disclosure is something that people generally do with close friends or spouses rather than with strangers. Indeed, it is something that typically defines close relationships (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; Sullivan, 1953; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Therefore, we specifically looked at interactions between actual friends in our study.

Second, when studying self-disclosures in friendships, most researchers have limited their analyses to same-gender friends. Due to the absence of studies looking at self-disclosure between male and female friends, Dindia and Allen (1992) were unable to consider the effects of target gender on friends' self-disclosure in their meta-analysis. Previous comparisons of self-disclosures between women and men in cross-gender interactions generally have been with either strangers or dating/married couples (e.g., Morton, 1978). The present study's inclusion of cross-gender friends may therefore contribute to our understanding of this relatively ignored relationship. Moreover, by including both same-gender and cross-gender friends, it becomes possible to test for the effects of both speaker gender and partner gender (Dindia, 1988; Kraemer & Jacklin, 1979).

Third, the vast majority of studies looking at gender differences in self-disclosure between friends have used self-report measures (Dindia & Allen, 1992). One potential limitation of self-reports is that they assess people's *perceptions* of their self-disclosures but may not accurately represent their actual self-disclosure *behaviors* (Berndt & Hanna, in press). Another advantage of the present study, therefore, was its analysis of actual conversational behavior between friends. Moreover, it represents one of the few observational studies of both same- and cross-gender friendships.

One final factor that we considered when designing our study was the topic selected for discussion. Simply, if people discuss impersonal topics to discuss, they are less likely to offer intimate thoughts and feelings. We know from other research that men generally prefer talking about relatively impersonal topics such as their work, sports, or shared activities compared to women who generally prefer discussing more personal matters (see Bishop, 1993, for a review). However, most observational studies compar-

ing men's and women's self-disclosures have used unstructured situations in which partners were able to talk about whatever they wanted. A less common approach, which was taken in the present study, is to explicitly ask the research participants to discuss a personal topic. For example, Derlega, Winstead, and Wong (1987) found no gender differences in ratings of intimacy when they asked research participants to write intimate messages to their same-gender friends. An analogous study examining actual conversational behavior would help address the extent that women and men are apt to differ in contexts that are likely to yield self-disclosure. This would be especially helpful in order to test for possible gender effects on listener supportiveness.

In summary, the present study sought to extend our understanding of the relationship between gender and self-disclosure in the following ways: First, in contrast to most previous observational studies that have looked at conversations between strangers, we examined social interactions between both same-gender and cross-gender friends. Additionally, we extended previous approaches to the study of self-disclosure by examining both the discloser's and the listener's conversational behavior. We predicted that women would demonstrate both more self-disclosure and more active listening than would men, and that these differences would be especially likely with same-gender friends.

Our sample was comprised of 18-21 year olds. The "post adolescent" years are an important period in the development of same- and cross-gender friendship intimacy (Fischer, 1981). It is also a time when adult gender roles are typically being consolidated. Therefore, this is a pertinent developmental period for studying intimacy-related social processes.

METHOD

Sample

Pairs of college undergraduates between 18-21 years old ($M = 19$ years) from mostly middle-class, European-American backgrounds participated. The sample comes from a larger project investigating contextual influences on friends' conversational behavior. There were 18 female-female pairs, 18 female-male pairs, and 18 male-male pairs. Members of each pair had known one another for at least 2 months ($M = 26$ months). The three groups did not significantly differ in length of friendship, $F(2, 51) = 1.97, ns$.

Procedure

Each pair was seated in a university research office. There were four 5-minute conversation sessions that followed. For each one, the two friends were left in the room by themselves while their conversations were audio recorded. First, they were asked to talk about whatever they wanted. Thereafter, they were assigned three specific topics in counterbalanced order across friendship pairs. For the topic that is the focus of the present study, the participants were asked to discuss how their family relations had changed since they entered college. One of the other topics involved planning a day together, and another topic involved a joint decision-making task. The family relations topic was chosen for study because it specifically involved self disclosure.

Measures

Transcripts of the tape-recorded conversations were coded for the incidence of personal self-disclosures and various listening responses by three female research assistants. This procedure occurred after the research assistants had obtained satisfactory inter-coder reliability on each of the measures described below.

Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosure thought units were used as the unit of analysis. Specifically, any statement or set of statements referring to a particular private fact or personal feeling regarding one's family was coded as an instance of self-disclosure. The inter-coder agreement for identifying self-disclosures had a *kappa* (k) coefficient of .64, which is considered a good level of agreement (Bakeman & Gottman, 1986). The mean number of self-disclosures for each friendship group is summarized in Table I.

Following Morton's (1978) distinction between descriptive intimacy (private facts) and evaluative intimacy (personal thoughts or feelings), each family disclosure was rated on each dimension using 5-point rating scales. With descriptive intimacy, ratings ranged from 1 = Expression of impersonal/public information about the self (e.g., "My family is from San Diego") to 5 = "Expressions of highly personal facts about self" (e.g., "My parents kicked me out of the house when I was sixteen"). Inter-rater agreement for descriptive intimacy had an *alpha* coefficient of .86. With evaluative intimacy, ratings ranged from 1 = Expression of no feeling, opinion,

Table I. Means and Standard Deviations for Self-Disclosure Behaviors by Speaker Gender and Partner Gender

Behavior	Female speakers		Male speakers	
	Female partners	Male partners	Female partners	Male partners
Number of disclosures				
<i>M</i>	11.55	11.33	13.94	13.33
<i>SD</i>	4.06	5.14	4.83	4.50
Mean expressiveness rating				
<i>M</i>	3.24	3.29	3.20	3.32
<i>SD</i>	0.31	0.27	0.42	0.29
Mean intimacy rating				
<i>M</i>	3.15	3.09	3.14	3.20
<i>SD</i>	0.37	0.38	0.35	0.36

or judgment (e.g., "I was crying with my parents"). The *alpha* coefficient for inter-rater agreement for evaluative intimacy was .86.

Listener Responsiveness

Burleson's (1982) comforting communication strategies were adapted to classify listeners' verbal responses to each of their partner's self-disclosures. The listener codes distinguish between verbal responses that either deny or ignore the other's thoughts and feelings (resistance, abstaining), implicitly recognize the other's thoughts and feelings (laughs, back channels, simple acknowledgments, clarification questions), or explicitly acknowledge the other's thoughts and feelings (showing similarity, explaining, active understanding). The specific response categories are presented and their corresponding *kappa* (κ) coefficients of inter-coder agreement are presented below. Also, Table II summarizes the mean proportions of each listening response for female speakers and female listeners, female speakers and male listeners, male speakers and male listeners, and male speakers and female listeners.

Resistance. This included (1) overtly negative responses such as criticism, trivializing comments, or hostile laughter, or (2) changing the topic or redirecting attention to the self. This type of response rarely occurred and it was not possible to compute an index of inter-coder agreement. Therefore, resistance responses were not examined in the present analyses.

Table II. Means Proportions and Standard Deviations for Listener Behaviors by Speaker Gender and Partner Gender

Behavior	Female speakers		Male speakers	
	Female partners	Male partners	Female partners	Male partners
Active understanding				
<i>M</i>	.27	.13	.14	.14
<i>SD</i>	.16	.09	.16	.12
Showing similarity				
<i>M</i>	.15	.10	.12	.14
<i>SD</i>	.11	.10	.12	.10
Clarification questions				
<i>M</i>	.05	.12	.09	.10
<i>SD</i>	.05	.13	.13	.09
Simple acknowledgments				
<i>M</i>	.08	.11	.09	.06
<i>SD</i>	.08	.11	.07	.06
Back channels				
<i>M</i>	.22	.27	.27	.22
<i>SD</i>	.10	.22	.19	.12
Laughter				
<i>M</i>	.02	.03	.02	.05
<i>SD</i>	.04	.08	.05	.05
Abstaining				
<i>M</i>	.14	.18	.18	.22
<i>SD</i>	.08	.15	.18	.17

Abstaining ($\kappa = .91$). This referred to the absence of any vocal listening response following a self-disclosing statement. It typically included silence following a disclosure. However, if the speaker continued talking after a disclosure and the listener had not provided any verbal response, an abstaining response was assigned.

Laughs ($\kappa = .95$). Non-hostile laughter following a self-disclosure was coded in this category.

Back Channel Listening Response ($\kappa = .65$). This type of response included short statements that acknowledged the other's self-disclosure (e.g., "That sounds hard").

Clarification Question ($\kappa = .90$). This included a short question aimed at clarifying what was previously said or meant (e.g., "When did that oc-

cur?"). It did not include questions that encouraged the other person to interpret their disclosure.

Showing Similarity ($\kappa = .90$). This referred to reciprocal disclosures in which the listener indicated having had a similar experience as expressed in the friend's prior disclosure. In showing similarity, the speaker does not attempt to change the focus away from the other person.

Explaining. This referred to (1) giving advice ("Maybe you should talk to her") or (2) trying to provide a rationalization to the friend regarding the previous disclosure ("They probably don't care anyway"). This type of response rarely occurred and it was not possible to compute an index of inter-coder agreement. Therefore, explaining responses were not examined in the present analyses.

Active Understanding. This response category referred to (1) explicit acknowledgments of the other's feelings and opinion, such as reflective comments ($\kappa = .74$) or (2) asking a relevant question that directed the other to consider aspects of his or her previous disclosure in a reflective manner ($\kappa = .87$). Active understanding responses are illustrated in the conversational excerpt appearing in Table III.

Proportion scores were used with the listener response variables. When more than one type of response followed a partner's disclosure, the following decision rules were used to determine which response was counted: (1) When there was both a nonverbal response (abstain or laugh) and a verbal response, the verbal response was used. (2) When there were two or more verbal responses, the one considered more supportive was counted in the following rank order (from most to least supportive): active understanding, explaining, showing similarity, clarification question, simple acknowledgment, and back channel.

RESULTS

The Kraemer-Jacklin statistic (Kenny, 1988; Kraemer & Jacklin, 1979) was used to test for the effects of actor (speaker) gender, partner gender, and their interaction on self-disclosure and listener behaviors. Unlike conventional statistical tests such as ANOVA, the Kraemer-Jacklin statistic adjusts for dependency between actor and partner behaviors before testing for the effects of actor gender, partner gender, and their interaction. The resulting statistic is a Z score that is derived from the adjusted estimate and dividing by its standard error.

Table III. Illustration of Differences in Use of Active Understanding Responses in Female and Male Friendship Pairs^a

Conversation between two female friends

In the following excerpt, Tanya is in the midst of telling Dana that her relationship with her mother has been more tense since moving to college and becoming more independent. The excerpt picks up at a point when Tanya is comparing her situation to that of her older sister who went to college in a different city.

- Tanya: She didn't change really. She still was kind of the same person she was in high school and didn't like get—learn any of these earth-shattering sort of mind-blowing ideas that I've kind of come into.
- Dana: Part of it might be the atmosphere in Santa Cruz is so different than Santa Barbara.
- Tanya: Right well that's total—That's totally it. That is—That's totally it.
- Dana: Yeah. Also part of the strain now might be that when you're at home, you're with her every day, so it's more of a friendship, and you could talk to her about things that are happening every day but now that you're away.
- Tanya: Yeah. I just think that she has a harder time when I was at home.

Conversation between two male friends

Jake is in the middle of describing how he moved to live with his father when he was younger.

- James: We only have 5 minutes.
- Jake: Oh okay okay. So I went to go live with my dad actually and so that uh created, you know, a distance between me and my mom. And she's blamed it on herself in a sense and there was that radical kinda change like as if we're gonna go from say high school to college.
- James: ((abstaining responses))
- Jake: I was going from junior high school to high school moving away from my mom. So there was a change from my relationship with me and my mom.
- James: ((abstaining responses))
- Jake: But, uhm, my dad, you know, the relationship with me and my dad actually grew because I'm, I'm, I moved with him and we got closer.
- James: ((abstaining responses))
- Jake: And when I moved away to college it was actually hard on him. See, I don't think it would have been as hard on him if I had stayed with my mom but it was a little bit harder. So my relationship with my father—
- James: You mean it wouldn't have been as hard for him if you had stayed with your mom as it was for her, your staying with your dad?

^aAll names were changed. When there was no verbal response following a self-disclosure thought unit, an abstaining response was assigned to the listener.

Self-Disclosures

Total Self-Disclosures

The Kraemer-Jacklin statistic was used to test for speaker gender, partner gender, and interaction effects on the frequency of self-disclosures. There was a significant speaker gender effect with total self-disclosures, $Z = 1.96$, $p < .05$. As seen in Table I, contrary to expectation, men made more self-disclosures than did women.

Evaluating and Descriptive Intimacy Ratings

There were no significant effects associated with either mean evaluative intimacy or mean descriptive intimacy ratings.

Listener Responses

Square root transformations were carried out on showing similarity, clarification questions, simple acknowledgments, and laughter in order to adjust for positive skewness. However, non-transformed means and standard deviations are presented in tables for ease of interpretation and comparison with the other variables.

Significant effects occurred with two listener responses. First, there was a partner gender effect associated with clarification questions, $Z = 2.28$, $p < .05$. As seen in Table II, clarification questions were more likely following self-disclosures from male than female friends.

Second, a partner gender effect occurred with active understanding, $Z = 2.02$, $p < .04$. Active understanding was more likely with female than male partners. However, an interaction effect indicated that the partner gender effect was specific to the female speakers, $Z = 2.58$, $p < .01$. As seen in Table II, women with female friends were nearly twice as likely to use active understanding than were either women with male friends, men with female friends, or men with male friends.

Within-Group Differences in the Relative Likelihood of Response Types

The previous analyses tested for gender effects on the use of specific response types. We also carried out post hoc analyses to explore the extent that each friendship group differed in the relative use of the three most

likely responses across all friendship groups: back channel responses ($M = .23$, $SD = .12$), active understanding ($M = .18$, $SD = .13$), and abstaining responses ($M = .18$, $SD = .13$). Comparisons were carried out for each friendship group separately using response type as a repeated measure in an ANOVA. The respective means and standard deviations for each response type are presented in Table II (although listed means for males and females in the cross-gender pairs need to be averaged because dyad means were used in these analyses). Unlike the previous analyses using the Kraemer-Jacklin statistic, the ANOVAs do not determine the separate effects of speaker and partner gender.

Female Friends

Active understanding and back channels were the most likely response types among the female dyads. Both responses were more likely than abstaining responses, $F(1, 17) = 4.59$, $p < .05$, and $F(1, 17) = 4.59$, $p < .05$, respectively. The difference between active understanding and back channels was not significant, $F(1, 17) < 1$, *ns*.

Male friends

There were no significant differences among the male friends in the likelihood of the three most common response types: abstaining versus active understanding, $F(1, 17) < 1$, *ns*; abstaining versus back channels, $F(1, 17) < 1$, *ns*; active understanding versus back channels, $F(1, 17) = 2.90$, *ns*.

Cross-Gender Friends

The back channel response was the most likely among cross-gender friends. It was significantly more likely than active understanding, $F(1, 17) = 9.18$, $p < .008$. There was a nonsignificant trend toward a greater incidence of back channels than abstaining responses, $F(1, 17) = 3.25$, $p < .09$. There was no difference between the likelihoods of abstaining responses and active understanding responses, $F(1, 17) < 1$, *ns*.

DISCUSSION

Our findings confirmed that speaker gender and partner gender affected conversational behaviors during self-disclosure discussions. The first

set of analyses was concerned with variations in the self-disclosures. Although there were no gender effects regarding the mean levels of evaluative or descriptive intimacy, there was a gender difference in the number of disclosures made. Men tended to make more self-disclosing statements than did women. This result was unexpected and runs counter to research reports suggesting that women are more disclosing than men (see Dindia & Allen, 1992; Hill & Stull, 1987). However, there have been a few reports indicating a higher rate of self-disclosure by men than women—but only with cross-gender targets (Davis, 1978; Derlega et al., 1985; Hacker, 1981). The authors of these studies variously suggested that men disclosed more than women as a way to control the interaction (Davis, 1978; Derlega et al., 1985), or that women disclosed less in order to pay more attention to the men (Hacker, 1981). Although plausible, these interpretations do not explain the present study's finding that men made more self-disclosures regardless of the partner's gender.

The way the situation was structured in our study may be partly responsible for men's greater incidence of self-disclosure. Unlike the previously cited studies, we looked at conversations between friends who were given a specific topic to discuss. By asking the friends to talk about their family relations, we thereby created a specific *task* for the participants to carry out. Therefore, perhaps the men were more likely than the women in our study to respond to the assigned topic in a goal-oriented manner (Aries, 1987). Additionally, discussing family relations may have been a more familiar conversation topic for the women than the men. Consequently, women may have felt they had less "new" to talk about with their friend than did the men.

Although men may not *prefer* to express personal thoughts and feelings, our result as well as the findings of other investigators (see Reis, Senachak, & Solomon, 1985; Winstead, 1986) indicate that men *can* self-disclose as much as (or more than) women. However, simply telling stories about one's family life may be a relatively simple conversational skill. In contrast, how the listener responds to self-disclosures may be the more telling conversational process to examine. Providing appropriate feedback requires knowing what to say and when to say it (Black & Hazen, 1990). Giving supportive feedback also involves focusing on the other person as opposed to the self. Research with children indicates that girls are more likely than boys to demonstrate these strategies (Black & Hazen, 1990; Burlinson, 1982). In a similar way, our second set of analyses indicated several gender-related differences in listener response types. However, as discussed below, our results indicated no overall speaker gender differences. Instead, partner gender effects and interaction effects were observed.

First, both women and men responded with proportionally more clarification questions to disclosures from male than female friends. Clarification questions are moderately supportive to the extent that they acknowledge the other's disclosure. However, clarification questions do not address the disclosure as explicitly as occurs with active understanding. By favoring this strategy, perhaps women and men alike believed that it was more appropriate to respond less directly to male friends' disclosures (see Derlega & Chaikan, 1976; Maltz & Borker, 1982; Perlman & Fehr, 1987). This idea will be further considered later in the discussion.

The other major finding was that women used more active understanding with female friends than did women with male friends, men with female friends, or men with male friends. Thus, women (but not men) were more likely to use active understanding responses with female than male friends, whereas women (as well as men) were more likely to use clarification request responses with male than female friends. Active understanding and clarification questions are both supportive responses that acknowledge the other's disclosure. However, active understanding provides a more explicit and elaborated acknowledgment of the other's disclosure and also may encourage the partner to explore the disclosure topic further. Perhaps with male friends, women (and men) seek to soften the directness of the exploration due to a belief that men are less comfortable with their disclosures than are women (see Maltz & Borker, 1982; Perlman & Fehr, 1987). Men themselves may be less likely than women to offer active understanding and simple acknowledgments because they believe that it would embarrass the friend (Maltz & Borker, 1982; Perlman & Fehr, 1987). Also, insofar that responsiveness functions to prolong an interaction and lead to feelings of greater intimacy (Davis & Perkowitz, 1979), men may avoid using supportive strategies due to the more competitive and emotionally reserved nature of their traditional friendships (Lewis, 1978; Sattel, 1983).

Other studies have similarly reported a tendency for women to be more responsive and supportive during conversation than men (see Aries, 1987; Burleson, 1982; Leaper & Holliday, 1995; Marche & Peterson, 1993; Tannen, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1985). It is also consistent with a recent report indicating that women were more likely than men to demonstrate topical responsiveness following self-disclosures from same-gender strangers (Shaffer, Pegalis, & Cornell, 1992). However, to our knowledge, this is the first observational study specifically examining speaker and partner gender effects on listener support to a friend's self-disclosure.

To illustrate the pattern of greater active understanding between female friends, an example from our study is presented in Table III. As illustrated in the excerpts, Dana responds directly to Tanya's comments and tries to help put her situation in perspective. This pattern of interaction

contrasts with the conversation between Jake and James also presented in Table III. As seen in the latter example, James does not provide regular responses to his friend's disclosures as seen with Dana and Tanya. It is only after a series of disclosures from his friend that James finally provides a reflective response.

Finally, it is worth noting that no speaker gender differences occurred that were specific to the cross-gender friends. The absence of this kind of effect runs counter to some studies that have reported a greater incidence of female than male conversational support during heterosocial encounters between strangers or romantic partners (Cunningham, Braiker, & Kelley, 1982; McLaughlin et al., 1981; West & Zimmerman, 1985). However, in the present study, we looked at interactions between friends. Perhaps there tends to be more symmetry in relationships between women and men based on friendship than when they are strangers or in a love relationship (see McWilliams & Howard, 1993; Monsour, Harris, Kurzweil, & Beard, 1994). More research is needed into the nature and dynamics of cross-gender friendships and their difference with same-gender friendships and heterosexual love relationships (O'Meara, 1989).

Limitations of Present Research

As previously noted, the present research represents one of the few observational studies of interactional behavior between both same-gender and cross-gender friends. Additionally, the study extends previous research on self-disclosure by also examining listener responses. Despite these strengths, there are limitations of the present research worth noting.

First, our sample is derived from a university campus where most students come from middle-class, European-American backgrounds. A different pattern of results may have been observed using a sample from a more different culture or ethnic group (Gudykunst, 1986), economic background (Hacker, 1981), or age group (Rotenberg & Chase, 1992).

Second, our research involved the use of a quasi-experimental design (Cooke & Campbell, 1979) because participants were not randomly assigned to being with either a same-gender or a cross-gender friend. Although partner gender effects suggest the influence of a situational variable, it may also be possible that those individuals who participated in the study with cross-gender friends were somehow different in either their social skills or preferences than those who participated with same-gender friends (see Hood & Back, 1971; Lewis, Winstead, & Derlega, 1989). This possibility can be addressed in future research by comparing those persons who have cross-gender platonic friends with those who do not. A possibly related mediating factor to consider would

be the person's gender-role self concept (see Hill & Stull, 1987; Leaper, 1987). Those persons with cross-gender friends may be less likely to adhere to traditional gender roles than others (see Leaper, 1994).

Finally, our method of recording friends' interactions was limited to codings of transcripts from audiotaped recordings. The transcripts included information regarding paraverbal forms of communication (e.g., voice tone, laughter, silences) but consideration of nonverbal information (e.g., nods, smiles, body movements) was not possible. The nonverbal channel is generally assumed to provide important information during emotional communications such as self-disclosures (Mehrabian, 1972). However, Krauss, Apple, Morecy, Wenzel, and Winton (1981) found no evidence to support this contention when they compared observers' judgments of emotional content from video, audio-only, and written presentations; transcripts were found as effective as video or audio presentations. Nonetheless, our research should be considered specifically as a study into *verbal* forms of listener support. Future research needs to explore the relation between the verbal and nonverbal channels further.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our research suggests some of the way that gendered social patterns may affect the quality of intimate relationships in adulthood. The results indicate a tendency for females to be more overtly responsive and supportive than males during intimate discussions in both same- and cross-gender friendships. These kinds of patterns have implications for our understanding of how women and men relate—or fail to relate—in marital relationships. An accumulating number of studies indicate that imbalances in self-disclosure and emotional support are related to marital dissatisfaction (Hendrick, 1981), marital distress and divorce (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Gottman, 1993), and domestic violence (Babcock, Waltz, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1993). It therefore appears that traditional gender-role norms may limit and sometimes even impair the quality of later social-emotional adjustment (Leaper, 1994; Leaper et al., 1989). Perhaps encouraging cooperative cross-gender contacts during childhood and adolescence would facilitate men's and women's capacity for enjoying mutually intimate relationships with one another in adulthood (Leaper, 1994).

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