

Ali, Lailatul. Malaysia: Sexual Self Disclosure and How it Affect Sexual Satisfaction: a Cross-Cultural Study
Abstract

Sexual self disclosure is how much a person is open enough to reveal oneself on their sexual aspects, or simply be put as communicating about their sexual aspects. This research is a preliminary study to understand how other factors such as gender and culture could affect one's openness to talk about sex and how sexual self disclosure could affect one's sexual satisfaction. It is known that talking about sex or any sexual related is considered taboo in eastern culture, particularly in Malaysia. Therefore, this study is determine to find if there is any difference in sexual self disclosure between eastern and western culture, as well as gender.

195 respondents from Malaysia and Australia participated in this research and answered 3 parts of questionnaire that consists two established questionnaire which are Sexual Self Disclosure Scale (SSDS) developed by Dr. William Snell in 1987 and Interpersonal Exchange Model of Sexual Satisfaction by Dr. Sandra Byers and Dr Lawrence, K. in 1998.

Introduction

Sex is always a topic that will be avoided by people especially those coming from a strict family, particularly because of the culture in Asia. Sex is assume as something people should not talk or discuss; a taboo.

However, there is a growing awareness on why sex is an important factor in a relationship and communication is the key in reaching satisfaction for both parties in sex. The increase number of divorce cases in Malaysia, and two of the factors are lack of communication and dissatisfaction in sex is an eye opener on why we need to tackle the problem of its core.

Lack of communication will lead to more other problems (Wood, 2002). When we less communicate, many other problems could arise as we did not try to solve the problems in a compromising manner. Marital or relationship dissatisfaction, sexual dissatisfaction, and other matters such as money, interference etc could not be tackle as a couple if they did not communicating well (Wood, 2002).

A study that compared happily married couple with unhappily married couples found that, in almost every regard, the happily married couples showed superior communication skills. Three patterns that are almost always related to serious long term problems in relationships are defensiveness, stubbornness, and refusal to talk with partner (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989).Opening up and sharing your thoughts and feelings with your partner helps you to grow together as a couple. Self disclosure lets your partner know what is wrong and how you feel about it, and enables you to ask for specific change (Fowers, 1998)

We grow up in a society instilled with a sense of shame about our sexuality and are taught at an early age that talking about sex is “dirty”. Approaching the subject of sex for the first time in a relationship implies moving on to a new level of intimacy, which can be scary. It also opens the way for rejection, which can be painful. (Carroll, 2007)

Good communication skills are an integral part of all healthy relationships, and couples who know how to communicate with each other are happier, more satisfied, and have a better chance of making their relationship last. Many relationship problems stem from poor communication. When it comes to sexual relationship, good communication skills are vital. By talking to one’s partner, one can share his/her sexual needs and desires and learn what his/her partner’s sexual needs are. In turn, this can strengthen their overall relationship. It is important to be honest and open and ask for what one need.

Sexual communication can contribute greatly to the satisfaction of an intimate relationship. Good communication about sexual desires and concerns has frequently been identified as a valuable asset to the development and maintenance of a satisfying and enduring sexual relationship (Byers & Demmons, 1999).

The ability to communicate about sexuality is one of the criteria of a sexually healthy person. Research has affirmed that intimacy is related both to couples’ relationship satisfaction (Greef & Malherbe, 2001; Toldstedt & Stokes, 1983). Furthermore, lack of intimacy is one of the most common reasons for seeking couple therapy (Doss, Simpson, & Christensen, 2004; Geiss & O’Leary, 1981). Therapists identify deficits in intimacy as one of the most damaging problems in relationships and as the most difficult problem to treat (Whisman, Dixon, & Johnson, 1997).

One aspect of intimacy in relationships is self disclosure, which involves revealing personal information and feelings to another person about oneself. According to Waring (1988), *self disclosure is the single factor which most influences a couple’s level of intimacy.*

Clear communication about sex is associated with greater satisfaction in sex (Sprecher & Cate, 2004). Communicating about sex sometimes requires that we do more than let a partner know whether or not we are interested. Sometimes we need to discuss particular sex issues such as “Would you like a different position?” or “do you like oral sex?” Not surprisingly, research confirms that people often have difficulty discussing such things (Fisher et al., 1980). Most young adults do discuss sexual issues now and then, but they say less to their partners about their sexual tastes and histories than they disclose about nonsexual preferences (Byers & Demmons, 1999). Still, sexual self disclosure is just like other forms of self disclosure in being fuller and more intimate when it is reciprocated by one’s partner. People are most comfortable talking honesty about sex if their partners do the same (Byers & Demmons, 1999).

Method

Research Design

This research is conducted by using the survey method which is questionnaire. There are two established questionnaires that has been used which are The Sexual Self Disclosure Scale (SSDS, introduced by Dr William Snell) and Interpersonal Exchange Model of Sexual Satisfaction (IEMSS) by Dr Sandra Byers. A combination of these two scales consists of 8 general questions (age, age of partner, number of years with partner, etc), 45 questions in part A (SSDS), and 37 questions in part B regarding on sexual satisfaction.

Subjects

The research consists of 195 participants, using the method of convenient sample. 100 participants are from a combination of urban and suburban people of Sydney, Australia, both male and female ranging from age 17- 63. Another 95 participants are from Malaysia mainly in Kuala Lumpur, Perak, Selangor and Sabah, also consists of both male and female with age vary from 22- 62. Participants are chosen based on whether they have sexual partner or not, despite whether they are married, dating or promiscuous.

Procedures

A standard guideline of procedure are been observed as this topic is very much sensitive especially in Eastern Culture. It is very important to get the participants consent and make sure on their confidentiality. The data collected are strictly use for research purpose and not to be judge based on their answers. Many factors are also taken under consideration such as anonymity, and what are the conditions that make them comfortable to answer the questionnaire. These are important to avoid any problems and setbacks. A few procedures were prepared before this study was conducted which are location determination and preparation of questionnaires.

Results

Demographic

Gender

There are two sets of respondents; Malaysian and Australian. Among 100 respondents from Australia, 47 are male (47%)while 53 are female (53%). Malaysia in the other hand have 95 respondents consists 56 male respondents (58.9 %) and 39 female respondents (41.1%).

Age

Australia respondents consists of people age ranging from 17-63 while Malaysia ranging from 20-63 years old.

Status

There are four classification of status which are single (promiscuous), in a relationship, married, widowed/divorced. It is reported that none of Australian respondents are single and having sex partner/s (promiscuous)(0%), 64 are in a relationship (64%), 33 of them are married (33%) and 3 are widowed/divorced (3%).

Malaysian respondents in the other hand reported 9 of them are single and promiscuous (9.5 %), 3 in a relationship (3.2 %), 81 are married (85.3 %) and 2 are divorced/ widowed (2.1 %).

Effect on sexual self disclosure towards sexual satisfaction

Malaysia : $R^2 = -.005$, $p = .484$

Australia : $R^2 = 0.110$, $p = .001$

This shows that for Malaysian participants, the results showed that it is not significant, while Australia is significant with $p = .001$, with % variance of 11%

Effect on sexual self disclosure towards sexual satisfaction. (Malaysia)

Model Summary

Coefficients(a)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.073(a)	.005	-.005	8.80659

a Predictors: (Constant), ssds

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	77.829	3.921		19.851	.000
	ssds	.023	.032	.073	.703	.484

a Dependent Variable: iemss

$R^2 = -.005$, $p = .484$

% variance: $R^2 = .005 \times 100$

= 5%

$t = .703$, $k > .05$

Australia :

Table 11 : Effect on sexual self disclosure towards sexual satisfaction. (Australia)

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.344(a)	.119	.110	8.44426

a Predictors: (Constant), ssds

Coefficients(a)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	66.570	6.090		10.931	.000
	Ssds	-.129	.035	-.344	-3.631	.000

a Dependent Variable: iemss

$R^2 = 0.110, p = .001$

% Variance : $R^2 = .0110 \times 100$

= 11%

$t = -3.631, k < .05$

Difference between Western and Eastern culture on sexual self disclosure.

Group Statistics

	Country	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
ssds1	malaysia	95	2.6449	.63113	.06475
	australia	100	3.7853	.53266	.05327

Independent Samples Test

		t-test for Equality of Means		
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
ssds1	Equal variances assumed	-13.660	193	.000
	Equal variances not assumed	-13.601	184.182	.000

Malaysia: \underline{M} = 2.6449, \underline{SD} = .63113 Australia : \underline{M} = 3.7853, \underline{SD} = .53266; t = -13.660, p = .001

Discussion

Based on the result, Australian finding showed $R^2=0.110$, which mean sexual self disclosure affecting sexual satisfaction at 11%; therefore the null hypothesis are rejected for the case of Australia. In the other hand, Malaysian data recorded that there is no significant effect of sexual self disclosure with sexual satisfaction; therefore the null hypothesis are accepted in the case of Malaysia.

In this study, it was clear that sexual self disclosure could not predict self satisfaction in Malaysia. Talking on sexual matters is considered taboo in eastern culture. Sexuality is regarded by many as taboo subject and as such is seen by parents as threat to the innocence of childhood. The fact that Malaysian socialized their children to be ashamed of discussing sexual matters contributes to why we did not disclose, even to our partner.

Malaysian hardly self disclose to their partner. As mentioned earlier, Western are more open to communicate about sexual matters as they were brought up to be open and do not ashamed of their own body. Malaysian is bound to the culture of not revealing themselves, as they feel vulnerable, and fear of rejection.

Struggling to find the correct language to communicate about sex is also another reason why Malaysian did not disclose. Some words are considered as vulgarity. For example, when a husband first wanted to disclose with his wife, certain words might not make the wife comfortable; especially if she came from a strict and very traditional family; and such the husband are considered as not a gentleman. Especially in eastern culture, we were not taught to “talk dirty” that explain why we are confused and do not know whether it is “ok” to use certain words. Using “too appropriate” language might sound to medical and might be too cold.

Religion is also a factor refraining them from questioning or even to openly discuss on sexual matters with their husband, especially on the topic men feel most sensitive.

Malaysian people did not predict sexual satisfaction based on sexual self disclosure. This in the other hand proves that Malaysia measure sexual satisfaction in other ways. One of the classic examples of misconception was that they measure sexual satisfaction as

something physical. Women always believe that the bigger a man's penis, the better sex he would perform while men believe that the well shaped a woman is, the better she performs. However, these misconceptions should not be an indicator to predict sexual satisfaction as it was proven that size does not matter when it comes to sex, it is how people "utilize it".

Another way of explaining this phenomenon is that divorce is less tolerated compared to western culture. By exclaiming to public that a couple get divorces because of they can not fit sexually would be more embarrassing; therefore it is best to keep quiet and enjoy the other side of them that are still lively; or worse to just keep silent for everyone's sake.

Conclusion

As a conclusion to this research, Malaysian did not disclose much on sexual aspect, and thus sexual self disclosure can not predict sexual satisfaction for Malaysian couple as they do not feel that sexual communication as essential for reaching sexual satisfaction.

Limitation of study

As this study is a preliminary study on sexual issues in Malaysia, there are many limitations in this study. First, the samples in Malaysia are different from Australian in terms of range of age, availability and the method of collecting data is convenient sample.

Range of age are different due to culture in Australia which are an open compared to Malaysia, thus the have sex partner as early as 17 (could be earlier, but the youngest participant is 17). There is a possibility of Malaysian who have sex partner as early as that age or maybe younger, however none of them dare to stand forward and answer as it is not acceptable here in Malaysia.

Method that have been used which is convenient sample might create bias, however due to the level of sensitivity of the topic been discussed, not everyone are happy to answer the questionnaire. It was not very much of a trouble to pass questionnaire in Australia, however I have to pass around to friends and acquaintances as well as entering the classes and assists them answering the questionnaire as some of the phrases are tricky and they are not familiar with.

Generalizing the culture of western and eastern is also another limitation in this study as growing awareness in Malaysia on how important to communicate and disclose with partner. There are Malaysians who feels that communication are important however those who does not might out number them.

Bibliography

- Byers, E. S., & Demmons, S. (1999) Sexual Satisfaction and sexual self disclosure within dating relationships. *Journal of Sex Research*, 36, 180-189
- Caroll, J. L. (2007). *Sexuality Now. Embracing Diversity*. 2nd Edition. Belmont,CA : Thomson Wadsworth.
- Doss, Simpson & Christenses (2004) in Knox, D. & Schacht, C.(2008) *Choices in Relationships, An Introduction to Marriage and Family*, 6th Ed. United States of America : Wadsworth, Thomson Learning.
- Fisher et al (1980) in Miller, R.S., Perlman, D., Brehm, S.S., (2007). *Intimate Relationships*, 4th Edition. New York : McGraw Hill.
- Fowers, B.J. (1998). Psychology and the good marriage. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 41 (4), 516.
- Geiss & O' Leary (1981) in Knox, D. & Schacht, C.(2008) *Choices in Relationships, An Introduction to Marriage and Family*, 6th Ed. United States of America : Wadsworth, Thomson Learning.
- Gottman , J. M., & Krokoff, L. J., (1989). Marital interaction and satisfaction: A longitudinal view. *Journal of Consulting & Clinical Psychology*. 57 (1), 45-52.
- Greef & Malherbe (2001) in Richard D. McAnulty, M. Michael Burnette. (2004) *Exploring Human Sexuality*. 2nd Edition. Boston : Pearson Education, Inc.
- Sprecher,S., Cate, R.M., (2004). *Sexual Satisfaction and Sexual Expression as Predictors of Relationship Satisfaction and Stability*. In J.H. Harvey, A. Wenzel, & S. Sprecher (Eds.) *The Handbook of Sexuality in Close Relationships*. (p.p 235-256) Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Toldstedt & Stokes 1983 in Lawrance, K., & Byers, E. S. (1995). Sexual Satisfaction in Long-term Heterosexual Relationships: The Interpersonal Exchange Model of Sexual Satisfaction. *Personal Relationships*, 2, 267–285.
- Waring (1988) in Knox, D. & Schacht, C. (2000) *Choices in Relationships, An Introduction to Marriage and Family*, 6th Ed. United States of America : Wadsworth, Thomson Learning.
- Whisman, Dixon & Johnson. (1997) in Roger R Hock, (2007). *Human Sexuality*. New York : Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Wood, J.T. (2002) *Interpersonal Communication: Everyday Encounters*. 3rd Ed. Belmont, CA, USA: Wadsworth Thomson Learning