Forms of Self-Disclosure Among Students Using Online Dating Applications in the Guidance and Counseling Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Lampung

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ABSTRACK. This study aims to understand the form of *self-disclosure* of students who use online dating applications in the Guidance and Counseling Study Program, FKIP, University of Lampung. *Self-disclosure* is the disclosure of personal information that is done voluntarily as part of interpersonal communication. The approach used is qualitative with a descriptive phenomenological method. The subjects of the study were four students who had used online dating applications for more than one year. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis with the help of ATLAS.ti software. The results of the study indicate that *self-disclosure* carried out by guidance and counseling students on dating applications takes place selectively, gradually, and contextually. The information shared generally starts from general things, then develops into a personal direction if trust and comfort are established. Guidance and Counseling students who use online dating applications are not only motivated by the desire to establish a romantic relationship, but also as a means to increase relationships, share experiences, channel emotions, and create a safe space for expression. However, in the process, students still show a careful attitude and select the information shared based on the quality of communication and perceptions of the

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INTRODUCTION

CHATGPT BILANG:

Digital transformation has brought significant changes to how individuals build social relationships, including forming romantic connections through online dating applications. These applications allow users to communicate, develop attraction, and even build emotional relationships without having to meet in person. According to wiederhold (as cited in utami, 2024), online dating applications make it easier for users to select potential partners based on specific preferences but also carry risks such as fraud, harassment, and identity theft. This phenomenon has become increasingly significant among the younger generation, especially university students who are considered digital natives. Reports from populix and kompas.com show that the majority of online dating app users come from millennials and gen z, with applications such as tinder, tantan,

and bumble dominating the market. Students, as individuals in a phase of identity and relationship exploration, tend to use these media not only to find partners but also as a coping mechanism for loneliness, academic pressure, and emotional needs. In this context, the process of self-disclosure becomes one of the key elements in building interpersonal relationships in the digital world.

Jourard (1971) stated that self-disclosure is a process in which an individual voluntarily shares personal information with another person. In his theory, there are five main aspects of self-disclosure: (1) intended disclosure, the intentional and planned sharing of personal information in interpersonal interactions, including family or social relationships; (2) amount, referring to the quantity or extent of personal information shared with others; (3) depth, describing how deep or intimate the disclosed information is, including how personal, sensitive, or emotional it may be; (4) valence, referring to the emotional value of the information shared, whether positive (such as pride) or negative (such as guilt); and (5) honesty, which indicates the level of truthfulness or accuracy of the information disclosed how much it reflects the individual's actual experiences and feelings.

In the context of relationships formed through online dating applications, self-disclosure is crucial because text-based communication requires openness as a foundation for building trust. However, self-disclosure in digital spaces also faces various challenges, such as the absence of non-verbal cues, limited social control, and the risk of manipulation or misuse of personal information, all of which can negatively affect users' mental health. For students in guidance and counseling, the ability to manage self-disclosure wisely is essential, as it forms part of their personal competence as future professional counselors. Corey (2016) emphasized that counselor candidates need emotional stability and personal integrity to build effective counseling relationships.

Several previous studies have highlighted this issue. Wibowo (2021) found that self-disclosure in online media occurs gradually and is highly influenced by user interaction intensity and trust levels. Cahyani and topan (2023) identified specific stages of interpersonal communication in online dating apps such as bumble. Safitri et al. (2023) examined users' rejection sensitivity and found that self-disclosure is influenced by perceptions of acceptance or rejection. Meanwhile, studies by rosenfeld et al. (2019) and whitty (2015) emphasized that while online dating apps expand social networks, they also pose emotional stability risks. Preliminary research among guidance and counseling students at the university of lampung revealed that using online dating applications leads to diverse experiences from expanding social connections to facing risks such as online harassment and fraud. These findings indicate the need for a deeper exploration of the forms of self-disclosure made by students who use such applications and the factors influencing them.

Based on this, the present study aims to explore the dynamics of self-disclosure among guidance and counseling students who use online dating applications, with the hope of providing a more comprehensive understanding of the psychosocial impacts of this phenomenon. Furthermore, this research seeks to examine how this phenomenon contributes to shaping the personality quality of future counselors in the digital era.

METHOD

This research was conducted using a qualitative approach. According to Creswell & Creswell (as cited in Ulfatin et al., 2021), a qualitative approach is used to explore and understand the meaning constructed by individuals or groups regarding social or human issues. This approach focuses on examining the subjective meanings of individual experiences and the context in which these experiences occur. Therefore, the qualitative approach is considered relevant for studying the self-disclosure practices of students who use online dating applications, as it allows researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of their perceptions and experiences.

The main data collection method used in this study was in-depth interviews. The interviews were conducted in the form of direct conversations, either individually or in groups, between the researcher and the informants. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with students who use online dating applications, conducted either face-to-face or via phone calls, depending on the

respondents' comfort and availability. The researcher used a pre-prepared interview guide as a reference for exploring information about the respondents' self-disclosure experiences while using the applications.

For the data analysis process, the researcher referred to Flick (as cited in Ulfatin), who stated that qualitative data analysis involves the process of classifying and interpreting linguistic (or visual) data to gain an understanding of both the explicit and implicit dimensions of meaning contained within the collected data. The researcher employed a thematic analysis method to identify recurring themes related to students' self-disclosure. The analysis was carried out by categorizing, organizing, and interpreting relevant themes. This process was supported by the use of ATLAS.ti version 8.4.3 software to ensure that data analysis was conducted systematically and efficiently.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study involved four active students from the Guidance and Counseling Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP), University of Lampung, who were purposively selected based on the criterion of having used online dating applications for more than one year. The applications used included Tinder, Omi, and Leomatch Bot. The participants had firsthand experience in developing digital interpersonal relationships and voluntarily shared their experiences through in-depth interviews. Based on data analysis using the Word Cloud feature and the coding process supported by ATLAS.ti software, the researcher identified dimensions of self-disclosure experienced by students using online dating applications. These findings were categorized into two main parts: codes that aligned with theory and codes that were unique (emerging from data but not found in theory). The theoretical codes included intended disclosure, amount, depth, valence, and honesty, while the unique codes were selectivity and caution in self-disclosure.

Intended Disclosure

Students revealed personal information with the intention of building social relationships, expanding their networks, and finding someone to talk to. Some participants also mentioned that using these applications served as a way to divert attention from loneliness, academic pressure, or boredom. This indicates that self-disclosure is not only performed to build closeness but also serves a psychological function as a coping mechanism. The intensity of openness was adjusted according to the purpose of interaction if the goal was merely friendship, the information shared was light; however, if emotional connection was expected, disclosure became deeper. This supports findings by Handayani et al. (2019), who stated that self-disclosure significantly affects academic stress levels. When individuals share their problems and pressures, they can receive feedback, advice, or support from others, ultimately reducing stress.

Amount (Extent of Information Shared)

The amount of information shared by students through online dating apps was generally limited and selective. Common details such as name, age, residence, university, and hobbies were usually shared first. Sensitive information like home address, family background, or past trauma was deliberately withheld to protect identity, considering the risks of personal data misuse in digital spaces. This finding aligns with the "disclosure breadth" concept in social penetration theory, where self-disclosure begins with broad and shallow information before progressing to more specific and intimate content (Derlega & Grzelak, 2001).

Depth (Level of Intimacy)

The depth of self-disclosure increased as trust and communication intensity grew. Initially, the shared information was surface-level, but as emotional connections developed, students began revealing more personal experiences such as academic stress, insecurity, anxiety, and future

aspirations. This represents the "disclosure depth" aspect, reflecting how deeply individuals are willing to share internal experiences. Students reported feeling more comfortable sharing emotional stories when their conversation partners responded empathetically and non-judgmentally. This is consistent with findings by Collins and Miller (1994), who revealed that empathetic responses increase individuals' willingness to disclose more deeply and emotionally.

Valence (Positive-Negative Direction of Disclosure)

The students' self-disclosure contained both positive and negative content. Positive stories included academic achievements, organizational experiences, and hobbies, while negative ones involved anxiety, heartbreak, or family issues. Students tended to adjust the emotional tone of their stories based on the conversational atmosphere. When their partners were open and sincere, they reciprocated with similar openness. This reciprocity strengthens interpersonal communication and motivates further disclosure.

Honesty (Authenticity)

In general, students tried to be honest and avoided creating false identities. However, they managed the amount of information shared to prevent forming negative impressions. Some participants admitted to intentionally curating their digital identity appearing mysterious or attractive by controlling their openness. Although not lying, they engaged in impression management to regulate self-presentation. Walther (2011) noted that individuals often edit their digital identity to create a desirable impression on online platforms. In dating apps, students may selectively share positive information while hiding less appealing traits.

Selectivity in Disclosure

Students displayed high selectivity in their self-disclosure. They observed their interlocutors' communication styles, topics, and responses before deciding to share further. If the interaction felt uncomfortable, aggressive, or showed signs of harassment, they would immediately terminate communication. This reflects evaluative ability in interpersonal relationships and acts as a self-protection mechanism in digital spaces with minimal social boundaries.

Caution in Self-Disclosure

Caution was a key mechanism observed in the students' communication patterns. They carefully considered what type of information to share, when to share it, and through which medium (online or offline). Students were aware that dating apps carry high risks of personal data misuse, prompting them to maintain emotional distance and avoid premature attachment. This demonstrates a high level of digital awareness, an essential aspect of modern communication literacy. Hollis et al. (2017) emphasized that digital awareness is crucial in helping individuals navigate both the risks and benefits of online interactions effectively and safely.

These findings align with the **Social Penetration Theory** proposed by Altman and Taylor (as cited in Almawati, 2021), which explains that interpersonal relationships develop gradually through increasingly deeper and more meaningful self-disclosure.

1. **Orientation Stage:** Interactions are shallow and impersonal, with general information such as name, age, hobbies, or favorite food. Participants start with safe topics to initiate conversation and build early interest.

2. **Exploratory Affective Exchange Stage:** More personal but not yet intimate disclosure occurs, such as sharing movie preferences, specific interests, or motivations for using the app indicating emotional openness through shared interests.

3. **Affective Exchange Stage:** Emotional and reflective openness emerges. Although not all participants reached this stage, two reported that self-disclosure on dating apps provided emotional relief and served as an outlet for venting feelings.

4. **Stable Exchange Stage:** This stage reflects consistent and stable closeness. Only one participant maintained regular communication and mutual openness with a match, developing a comfortable relationship even without romance.

Overall, this study shows that students using online dating applications experience a gradual interpersonal relationship development process from orientation to, in some cases, stable exchange. The success of reaching these stages depends on comfort, shared interests, and perceived safety in interaction. These findings highlight the importance of depth and valence dimensions in digital self-disclosure and demonstrate that online communication can follow relational patterns similar to face-to-face interaction.

CONCLUSION

This research reveals that students in the Guidance and Counseling Study Program who use online dating applications demonstrate complex and diverse dynamics of self-disclosure. The process of self-disclosure is carried out selectively and gradually, in line with social penetration theory, which describes the development of interpersonal relationships from superficial to deeper levels of intimacy.

The dimensions of self-disclosure identified in this study encompass the five main aspects proposed by Jourard: intended disclosure, amount, depth, valence, and honesty. Additionally, new dimensions emerged that were not included in the original theory, namely selectivity and caution, which reflect the students' awareness of digital risks and the need for strategic management of personal information. Students use self-disclosure not only to build emotional closeness but also as a coping mechanism for psychological pressures such as loneliness and academic stress. The depth of self-disclosure is strongly influenced by the interlocutor's response, the comfort level of interaction, and perceptions of digital safety.

Overall, the findings highlight that self-disclosure in digital spaces is an interpersonal process influenced by various psychosocial factors and serves as an essential competence for Guidance and Counseling students as future professional counselors. The ability to manage self-disclosure wisely not only supports the formation of healthy online relationships but also reflects integrity, emotional stability, and high digital literacy in facing modern communication challenges.

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