

Facilitation of Emotional Expression in Men

Carolina Galaviz & Timothy Oblad

McNair Scholar's Program at Texas A&M University - Kingsville



Abstract

There is a popular belief that women tend to be more emotionally expressive than men. However, gender differences in emotional expression could be traced to cultural practices or expectations that are upheld for men. In this study, it is acknowledged how restrictive expressivity and perceived social support could play a part in the development of alexithymia in adult men; having difficulties in identifying, describing and expressing emotions. Quantitative measures of alexithymia, emotional expression, perceived social support, and qualitative information about an experience from men's lives were collected through an online survey. Findings helped support the significance that social support had on mitigating the development of alexithymic traits. Correlations were also found between alexithymia and emotional expressivity scores. Common themes of men's emotional expression will also be discussed.

Introduction

- There is a cultural social expectation that men are not emotional, or that they are not supposed to be emotional. This is a dangerous assumption since all human beings have social and emotional needs, regardless of gender (Ruger et al., 2016).
- While research has improved our understanding of men's difficulty forming social connectedness (McKenzie et al, 2018), there is a lack of knowledge about effective remedial measures that would assist men in seeking support regarding their mental health or everyday struggles.
- The current study is important to augment positive psychology specifically to aid emotional expression in men. Encouraging emotional expressivity in men could bolster communication.

Purpose

The aim of this study was to observe the relationship that alexithymia has with emotional expressivity and perceived social support in adult men.

Convergent Mixed-Methods Approach

- Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected to understand the findings of the study by using personal experience to help explain the nominal results acquired through an online survey.

Methods

Participants

- 43 males
- Ages 18-55
- Mean age = 24

Procedure

- Digital/physical Flyer including QR code
- Google Forms
- Convenience and Snowball Sampling

Measures

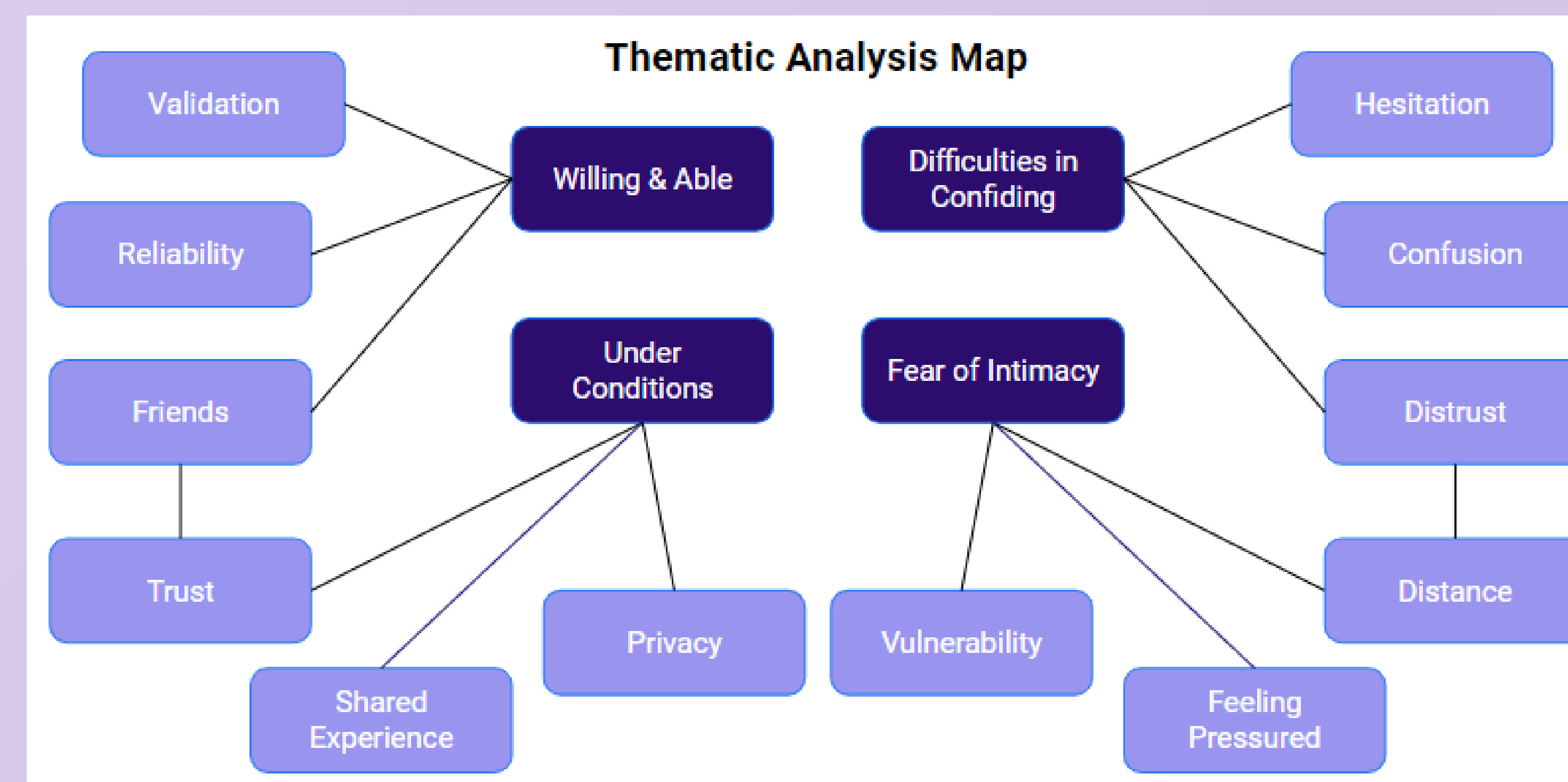
- Normative Male Alexithymia Scale (NMAS): 20-items, 7-point Likert scale
- Berkeley Expressivity Questionnaire (BEQ): 16-items, 7-point Likert scale
- Multidimensional Scale for Perceived Social Support (MSPSS): 12-items, 7-point Likert scale
- Open-ended question about a personal experience confiding in others

Results

Final hierarchical regression models predicting alexithymia through Support & Expressivity.

		Coefficients		
		b	SE	β
Age		-1.44	.400	-.39***
Ethnicity		4.9	3.9	.14
MSPSS		-.89	.22	-.49***
BEQ		-.38	.20	-.23 [^]
R ²		.200*		
Total R ²		.57***		
MSPSS	Family	-5.3	1.87	-.34**
	Friend	-7.26	2.40	-.37**
	Sig. Other	-.75	1.6	-.05
(BEQ)	Imp. Control	.73	.57	.20
	Neg. Express	-.66	.58	-.17
	Pos. Express	-3.38	.93	-.57***
R ²		.19**		
Total R ²		.58***		
		(.19**)		
		(.51***)		

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001; [^]trending



Discussion

In the present study, the relationship that emotional expressivity and perceived social support had with alexithymia was explored as well as taking measures to understand the contexts in which adult men feel enabled to express emotions to others.

- Participants displayed fewer traits of alexithymia when they reported higher perceived support as well as their age increased.
- Both family and friends showed to be the most influential sources of support that helped mediate alexithymia characteristics, friends being stronger than family.
- Positive expressivity was the only source within the BEQ to have statistical significance to serve as a buffer to alexithymia characteristics.
- Participants in willing and able theme (N = 17) showed the most expressivity from men since they felt like validation from others; feeling heard, accepted, and not judged.

Limitations

- Convenience & Snowball Sampling
- Sample Size
- Response Bias
- Uneven quant to qual responses

Future Research & Implications

- Research needed on positive expressivity & alexithymia
- Developing positive psychology/masculinity
- Improving health care for men
- Enabling effective communication

Conclusions

- Importance of age & perceived social support
 - Adult friendships
 - Family is important throughout lifespan
- Building positive relationships helps create meaningful connections with others
- Men are enabled to confide in others...
 - Reliable Support
 - Validation
 - Trust

References

