

5 Self-Presentation and Self-Disclosure

How to Impress Someone on a First Date

Prepare. Before the date do something that relaxes you, exercise, reading, yoga, singing your favorite song, whatever puts you in an easy going, happy mood. Wash yourself, put on antiperspirant/deodorant, brush your teeth, brush your hair, and don't forget to wear clean clothes! Make a list of conversation starters and questions you can ask them if you're having trouble finding a topic. Questions about their pet(s), taste in music, good books they've read lately, favorite thing to do outdoors, would you rather questions, are all good ideas. Remember these and read the front page of the newspaper, too.

—www.wikihow.com/Impress-Someone-on-a-First-Date

Anybody who has ever had a crush on someone will agree that attraction of some sort is a necessary but not sufficient cause for the initiation of an intimate relationship. Once two people's eyes have met across the room, they still face a gargantuan task on their way to forming a relationship. Two interpersonal processes take center stage at this point: Through self-presentation, people communicate what they want the other to think of them, and through self-disclosure they reveal who they truly are. And all this is necessary just to get relationships started! In mature relationships there is a continued need to communicate—everything from emotions to such seemingly trivial matters as deciding who gets the kids ready for school in the morning.

Self-Presentation

Once mutual attraction is in place, people's focus necessarily shifts toward becoming acquainted and getting to know each other. They may be initially motivated to create a favorable impression and to present a positive yet plausible image of the self. Of course, the ultimate goal of **self-presentation** is to elicit liking from another; therefore, self-presentation is more like creating a desired impression than a revelation of one's true self. As Goffman (1959) pointed out, it frequently involves the "over-communication of some facts and the under-communication of others." In this process, people can employ one or more tactics, such as the following (Leary, 1995):

Self-descriptions	Describing oneself in ways that communicate a desired impression
Attitude expressions	Expressing attitudes to convey the presence or absence of certain characteristics

Attributional statements	Explaining past and present behavior in ways that elicit a desired image
Compliance with social norms	Acting in ways that are consistent with the prevailing norms of the situation
Social associations	Expressing associations with desirable others and disassociations with undesirable others
Changes in physical environment	Using and modifying aspects of one's physical environment to elicit a desired impression

Perhaps the simplest way to create a desired impression is to use verbal *self-descriptions* of such things as likes and dislikes, accomplishments, family background, and personality characteristics. Usually this type of information is conveyed in face-to-face interactions, such as on a first date. However, it is just as easily conveyed in written form, which is perhaps why such self-descriptions are common in personal ads and online dating sites.

Given the importance of attitude similarity for close relationships, it is not surprising that people often volunteer information about their attitudes during the acquaintance process. Sometimes such *attitude expressions* are nothing more than self-descriptions (e.g., "I love soccer"). However, expressing attitudes often allows us to make further inferences about a person. For example, if we hear a person say that she is in favor of a law designed to reduce air pollution, we can safely infer that she is likely an environmentalist with generally liberal attitudes.

Sometimes people try to put past behavior in an appropriate context by complementing descriptions of their behavior with *attributional statements*. By and large, the types of attributions being volunteered are self-serving. Frequently, people try to convince others that a given behavior was due to positive motives (e.g., wanting to help someone) rather than ulterior motives (e.g., trying to look good in the eyes of others) (Doherty, Weingold, & Schlenker, 1990). Similarly, people tend to take credit for success ("I got an A in my psychology class because I worked really hard") but refuse to accept blame for failure ("I flunked my physics course because the instructor hated my guts") (Miller & Ross, 1975). When such attributions are volunteered in an interpersonal context, they can promote a positive impression and deflect a negative impression. Of course, under some circumstances, the opposite may also be true. By refusing credit for success, one can come across as modest, and by accepting blame for failure, one can create the impression of being magnanimous (Miller & Schlenker, 1985).

To some extent, people use *compliance with social norms* to control the impression they attempt to generate. This can manifest itself in a number of ways. Showing up for a date well groomed and well dressed indicates that we are sane and serious about the occasion. Furthermore, it may allow inferences about our level of good taste and socioeconomic status. Of course, the more general rule may be to match our appearance to the situation. A suit and tie may elicit a good impression when they are worn for a dinner in an expensive restaurant, but when the same suit is worn while attending a college football game, the wearer is likely to be perceived as goofy. In a similar fashion, we often try to match our emotional expressions to the situation. We express anger when someone tells us an upsetting story and delight when we hear about someone else's good fortune, primarily because we know that these types of reactions are expected.

At times, people manage the impressions they create by pointing to their *social associations*. People generally like to be associated with others who are popular, successful,

and attractive if for no other reason than to bask in their reflected glory. This desire is so strong that it can sometimes be downright comical. For example, the wall behind a urinal in the men's room of a popular Chicago Little League ballpark holds a plaque bearing the inscription "Michael Jordan stood here, September 12, 1992." Surely, to have used the same urinal as the six-time NBA champion and Presidential Medal of Freedom honoree has given many a young athlete (and perhaps their fathers, as well) a much-needed boost in self-esteem. People frequently tell about their personal associations, real or imagined, by dropping names ("I once auditioned for a role opposite Leonardo DiCaprio") in order to gain esteem in the eyes of others. Sometimes these associations can be of a more symbolic nature, such as basking in the reflected glory of an athletic team by wearing team-identifying apparel (Cialdini et al., 1976). Regardless of whether the associations we brag about are real, symbolic, or imagined, we tend to mention them in order to create a favorable impression.

Finally, people vary aspects of their *physical environment* in the service of self-presentation. To some extent, such seemingly rational choices as where and how to live may be partly influenced by self-presentational concerns. For instance, some people go to great lengths to avoid living in the suburbs and would think nothing of passing up a bargain on a minivan because it would not fit the image they are trying to project. Similar self-presentational concerns may influence the choice of furnishings and coffee-table books. After all, our impressions of people who have Plato's *Republic* lying around the living room are likely to be quite different from those who keep stacks of *Game Enforcer*. The way people decorate their offices may be similarly influenced by self-presentational concerns. The professor whose office door is plastered with cartoons is perhaps not primarily interested in making her students and colleagues laugh. More likely, she wants to create the impression of a good-natured, likable person.

Self-Presentation Norms

The extent to which any of these self-presentational tactics lead to the desired outcome of creating a favorable impression depends on how their application fits with a number of **self-presentation norms**. First among the norms that guide self-presentation is decorum (Leary, 1995), referring to behaviors that conform to established standards of behavior. If nothing else, decorum may modify our emotional expressions. If, while sitting in a restaurant, our friend tells us a sad story about her life, we are likely to respond with an expression of sadness. At the same time, the setting prevents us from weeping uncontrollably. In fact, a complete emotional breakdown under these circumstances is likely to have counterintentional effects because of the norm violation it involves (Baumeister & Tice, 1990).

A general norm of modesty similarly constrains our choice of self-presentational tactics. It suggests, for example, that to avoid being perceived as bragging or showing off, name-dropping as a means to point out one's social associations should not be overdone. Similarly, modesty prescribes that one should not be overly self-aggrandizing in one's self-descriptions. A successful businessperson is generally better off saying that he makes a good living rather than revealing that he makes an obscenely huge amount of money. On the other hand, too much modesty has the potential to backfire. In general, slight modesty is more effective than extreme modesty. Doing well but downplaying the importance of one's performance ("Today I performed five brain surgeries, but it's no big deal") does not lead to more favorable impressions. Downplaying one's accomplishments

is only effective when the other person is aware of them in the first place (Schlenker & Leary, 1982).

A norm of behavioral matching prescribes that two people's self-presentations should match somehow. If someone is boastful, we are to be boastful in return. If someone is modest, we should likewise be modest. Finally, the norm of self-presentational consistency dictates that people should behave in ways that are consistent with their expressed attitudes and that this consistency manifests itself in a variety of situations and over time. People who say one thing one day and the opposite the next day tend to be perceived as weak, unreliable, and unpredictable.

As is often the case, how people go about presenting themselves to others is to some extent influenced by more or less stable dispositions. For example, people who fear negative evaluations may approach their self-presentation with an extra dose of caution (Leary & Allen, 2011). When adolescents engage in risky behaviors, like drinking, driving recklessly, or performing stunts, they often do so for self-presentational reasons (Martin & Leary, 2001). Older adults are especially likely to employ self-presentational tactics to create the impression that they are competent and self-reliant (Martin, Leary, & Rejeski, 2000).

Self-Presentation in the Heat of the Interaction

In many cases, self-presentational tactics are employed during a dyadic interaction such as a date. This poses some unique challenges for both the senders and the recipients of self-presentation. To the extent that self-presentation entails the undercommunication of certain facts, senders can find themselves forced to keep a tight lid on the kinds of things they want to conceal. As noted in the previous chapter, this can be a most daunting task, as it is notoriously difficult to suppress any kind of thought. People often succeed at keeping an unwanted thought out of consciousness for a period of time when they devote a considerable amount of effort to it (Vohs, Baumeister, & Ciarocco, 2005). This depletion of cognitive resources can lead to outcomes quite contrary to the intended ones. For instance, when self-regulatory stores are depleted, our efforts at self-control are diminished, and we may find ourselves talking too much or blurting out inappropriate and embarrassing things (Vohs et al., 2005).

Another explanation for why self-presentation can backfire has little to do with depletion of resources. Working hard to keep unwanted thoughts out of consciousness can also lead to a massive rebound of the suppressed thought later on (Wegner et al., 1987). More important, when people's attentional focus is divided between suppressing a thought and another task, such as engaging in a conversation with another, attempting to suppress a thought can make that thought hyperaccessible to consciousness (Wegner, 1994; Wegner & Erber, 1992). As a result, people often cannot help but blurt out the very thing they are trying to suppress. In the context of self-presentation, this means that we may often end up communicating those things we are trying to hide.

Whereas the attentional demands placed on a self-presenter by virtue of interacting with another can be detrimental, these same demands on a recipient's attention can work to the sender's advantage. In some ways, the goal of creating a favorable impression is directed at eliciting attributions of positive personality traits (e.g., warm, honest, kind, witty, etc.). In listening to a self-presentation, the recipient's focus of attention is necessarily directed toward the sender. As research on impression formation has shown (e.g., Storms, 1973; Taylor & Fiske, 1975), focusing attention on a person (as opposed to the situation) in

itself can lead to dispositional, or personality, attributions. Furthermore, it generally takes less effort to generate dispositional attributions than situational attributions. In forming impressions of others, we often rely on implicit personality theories that inform us about which traits and behaviors go together. Thus, when someone tells us that she went out of her way to save a neighbor's cat from drowning, we can instantly infer that the person is helpful as well as kind. Situational attributions are harder to make for two reasons. First, situational information is generally difficult to come by. Second, even when it is available, recipients may be preoccupied with self-presentational concerns of their own, thus depriving them of the attentional resources needed to take situational information properly into account (Gilbert, Pelham, & Krull, 1988).

Detecting Deceit in Self-Presentation

Two people who meet for the purpose of creating a favorable impression with one another find themselves in a somewhat paradoxical situation. While they are trying to generate favorable impressions of themselves, they are to some extent aware that this may be the other person's goal, as well. From this perspective, people may be motivated to find out just how truthful the other is in presenting himself or herself. This is often hard to figure out from verbal descriptions alone, unless they are particularly outrageous ("I used to date Orlando Bloom, but I got bored with him very quickly"). Instead, we often have to rely on nonverbal cues to detect whether someone is telling the truth or lying to us. Nonverbal cues (e.g., facial expressions) are difficult to control, and thus people's thoughts and feelings may leak out despite their best efforts to conceal them (DePaulo, 1992). If anything, the higher the stakes, the more likely that leakage will occur (DePaulo, Lanier, & Davis, 1983). One way in which this manifests itself is through inconsistencies among different channels of nonverbal communication (DePaulo, Stone, & Lassiter, 1985). For example, a person may look us straight in the eye while telling us about his occupational accomplishments, thus conveying openness and honesty on his face. If, at the same time, the person shifts his body around nervously, we can infer from the discrepancy between facial expressions and postural movements that he may be lying.

Furthermore, deceit is reflected in people's speech. The pitch of their voices tends to rise (Zuckerman, Spiegel, DePaulo, & Rosenthal, 1982), and they engage in more sentence repair (Stiff et al., 1989). Interestingly, the more motivated people are to lie about something, the more likely it is that their true thoughts and feelings will leak out through their nonverbal behavior (DePaulo, 1992). Of course, detecting deceit requires that we pay attention not only to what people say to us but also to their nonverbal behavior. Therefore, the successful detection of deceit may be impaired when we are preoccupied with our own self-presentation.

Virtual Self-Presentation

Impairments of this kind matter little when we connect with others from afar and within the comforts of our home through social networking sites and online dating services. As of January 2017, 1.87 billion people worldwide have profiles on Facebook. If you're one of them, reflect on your own profile for a moment. What is it that you are trying to communicate about yourself? Is it some idealized version of you that does not accurately reflect who you are? Or does it represent your best shot at presenting what you are truly like? If you

are like most people, your profile will likely correspond to how your close friends perceive you, that is, who you really are (Back et al., 2010). In other words, Facebook profiles tend to be accurate representations of their owners' personalities. And judging by the results obtained with a German sample, this is especially true for people who are extroverted and open to experience (Back et al., 2010). Online self-presentation, like that on Facebook, has a couple of advantages over face-to-face self-presentation. First, it allows for selective self-presentation because it is more controllable and thus can be more aligned with specific self-presentational goals (Walther, 2007). Second, to the extent that self-presenters are motivated to craft a flattering version of themselves that's vetted for attractiveness by a network of friends, looking at one's own profile can enhance self-esteem (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). This boost, however, comes with a price tag as it seems to impair cognitive performance. In one study (Toma, 2013) participants who had spent some time looking at their Facebook profile performed worse on a task involving mental arithmetic than participants who had inspected the profile of a stranger.

Although profile pictures on Facebook play an important role in the initiation of close relationships, as we have seen in Chapter 3, they really take center stage when it comes to online dating services like Tinder and Match.com. They have proliferated in recent years, and people seeking relationships have flocked to them in ever increasing numbers (Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006). Although facilitated by computer-mediated communication, the competition for dates remains stiff. Attractive profiles that paint the most desirable portrait of users would go far in securing a date, thus inviting a measure of deceit when we feel that we may be falling short. Inspections of online daters' profiles (Toma & Hancock, 2010) suggest that daters low in attractiveness were likely to enhance their profile photographs and lie about their physical descriptors (height, weight, age). Men tend to exaggerate claims about their height, while women give inaccurate information about their weight (Toma, Hancock, & Ellison, 2008).

Online daters also realize they must tread the fine line between impression management and attracting someone who will like them for who they are (Toma et al., 2008; Gibbs, Ellison, & Heino, 2006). To this end, many have learned to attend to an assortment of small cues they use as possible "windows" into the true character of the other person (Toma et al., 2008). For instance, some online daters screen profiles for misspelled words or poorly written passages, viewing them as clues to a person's educational attainment (Ellison et al., 2006). How do we successfully convey who we are to interested others . . . and keep them interested?



Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- Dating via the Internet permits self-presentation in areas that are easily and immediately verifiable upon meeting in person, such as physical characteristics. How would you explain the fact that in spite of this some people still chose embellishment over complete honesty?

Models of Self-Disclosure

It probably goes without saying that relationships cannot survive very long on good impressions alone. In fact, self-presentational concerns may be an outright hindrance

for the further development of a relationship. For example, if two romantically involved people refuse each other access to their homes out of fear that the decor may not match the image they worked so hard to convey, trouble is likely to ensue. The point is that relationship development is closely tied to changes in communication. Research confirms that the most satisfied couples move from self-presentation and self-enhancing communications to self-verifying ones as their relationships mature (Campbell, Lackenbauer, & Muise, 2006). That is, we eventually have to go beyond merely coming across as likable and instead reveal a sense of who we really are. This is accomplished through *self-disclosure*, a process that has been defined as “what individuals verbally reveal about themselves to others (including thoughts, feelings, and experiences)” (Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993, p. 1). Self-disclosure in developing relationships follows a fairly predictable path, which has been captured by several theoretical models.

Self-Disclosure as Social Penetration

According to **social penetration theory** (Altman & Taylor, 1973), we can look at self-disclosure in terms of the number of topics that are covered (its breadth) as well as the personal significance of the topics (its depth). Early in a relationship, self-disclosure may be limited to a few superficial topics, often indicating simple preferences (“I like Lite beer”). As the relationship develops, self-disclosure becomes more intimate (“Sometimes I have too many Lite beers”) to the point of being very intimate (“When I drink too many Lite beers, I go crazy”). At the same time, the number of topics covered in self-disclosure increases, too. To some extent, the course of self-disclosure resembles a wedge that becomes deeper through the increasing levels of intimacy and wider through the increasing number of topics covered, as illustrated in Figure 5.1.

Social penetration theory predicts that as a relationship develops, self-disclosure goes from narrow and shallow to broad and deep. This raises two important issues. First is

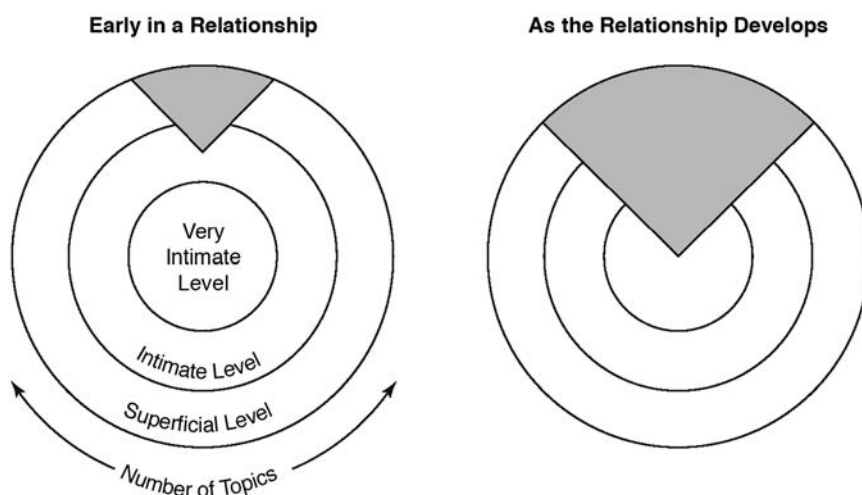


Figure 5.1 The Social Penetration Model of Self-Disclosure

the question of causality. One could argue that increasing self-disclosure causes a relationship to develop further. However, one could just as easily argue that self-disclosure is a result of relationship development. In other words, the closer two people become, the broader and deeper their self-disclosures will be. The solution to this apparent riddle is that both processes are possible, which has led some (Derlega et al., 1993) to propose that self-disclosure and relationships are *mutually transformative*. That is, self-disclosure increases as a relationship develops and relationships develop partly as a result of self-disclosure.

The second issue relates to what happens to self-disclosure over time. By virtue of employing the analogy of a wedge, social penetration theory implicitly suggests that the increase in self-disclosure over time is gradual and linear for some time before eventually leveling off. However, this is not necessarily the case. Instead, the rate of change in breadth is not the same as the rate of change in depth. People tend to increase the number of topics they talk about before they increase the intimacy of their self-disclosures. Once the increase in topics levels off, intimacy increases sharply (Brehm, 1992). At the same time, couples on the verge of a breakup tend to decrease the number of topics on which they self-disclose but actually increase the intimacy of their self-disclosures (Tolstedt & Stokes, 1984).

Furthermore, no two relationships develop at the same rate. In some relationships, self-disclosure may increase gradually, but instead of leveling off, it might actually decrease. Research on couples who have been together for some time supports this idea. For example, Huston, McHale, and Crouter (1986) found that couples became less disclosing after just one year of marriage. At the same time, in relationships that fall under the general heading of “love at first sight,” self-disclosure may develop almost immediately and increase sharply rather than gradually. In fact, couples who show this pattern of self-disclosure are more likely to stay together than couples who follow a more gradual pattern (Berg, 1984; Berg & Clark, 1986; Berg & McQuinn, 1986). Of course, one does not know whether the longevity of such relationships is due to the particular pattern of self-disclosure or something else. It appears, however, that couples self-disclose more rapidly when the reality of their relationship fits their ideal of a relationship fairly well (Berg & Clark, 1986).

Self-Disclosure Reciprocity

Whatever the exact time course of social penetration and depenetration, how do people manage how they self-disclose as couples? Unlike self-presentation, self-disclosure involves two people interacting with one another face-to-face, by text messaging, or through some other medium. Two people manage to increase or decrease their levels of self-disclosure through *self-disclosure reciprocity* (Berg & Archer, 1980, 1982). This strategy is akin to a tit-for-tat, whereby people tend to match the other's self-disclosure in terms of its intimacy and valence (Taylor & Belgrave, 1986). In other words, highly intimate self-disclosures are reciprocated with intimate self-disclosures, whereas self-disclosures low in intimacy are reciprocated in kind. Similarly, positive self-disclosures (“I’m thinking of getting a puppy”) are reciprocated with positive self-disclosures (“I like dogs”), whereas negative self-disclosures (“My dog just died”) are also reciprocated in kind (“I once had a hamster that drowned”). Thus, one important function of the reciprocity norm is that it regulates how people go about disclosing to one another (Derlega, Harris, & Chaikin, 1973).

Additionally, there is evidence that responding to another's self-disclosure in kind is associated with attraction (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004). Berg and Archer (1980) exposed research participants to a taped interaction that had allegedly taken place between two strangers. One of the strangers disclosed items that were either low or high in intimacy. The other stranger (a) responded in kind, (b) responded to a highly intimate disclosure with a disclosure low in intimacy, or (c) responded to a disclosure low in intimacy with a highly intimate disclosure. Research participants were asked to indicate how much they liked the stranger who responded to the initial self-disclosure. As predicted, liking was strongly determined by the extent to which the responding stranger matched the other's initial level of self-disclosure (see also Chaikin & Derlega, 1974). Moreover, matching the valence of self-disclosures also impacts liking. Apparently, reciprocating a partner's good news with happiness and enthusiasm had beneficial effects in the form of increased feelings of intimacy and greater marital satisfaction (Gable et al., 2004).

These findings are important because they suggest that self-disclosure by itself does not produce attraction. Rather, attraction appears to be a result of following a tit-for-tat strategy by which people match each other's levels of self-disclosure. Of course, people could pursue a matching strategy simply to follow a perceived norm of reciprocity. On the other hand, the extent to which someone matches or mismatches another person's level of self-disclosure itself conveys information.

According to Berg and Archer (1982), there are at least three different aspects to self-disclosure. Through **descriptive intimacy**, people convey factual information, which, among other things, can be used by the other to form an impression. Through **evaluative intimacy**, people express strong emotions and judgments, which can help in being liked by the other. Finally, and most importantly for the present purpose, through **topical reciprocity**, people convey that they are responsive and flexible. In other words, by sticking with the same topic in response to another's self-disclosure, one elicits positive attributions about one's personality, and this in turn can lead to an increase in attraction. Switching to a different topic, on the other hand, may lead to negative attributions and a resulting decrease in attraction. This makes a great deal of sense. Imagine, for example, that during the course of a first date, we reveal that we like animals. If our date responds by subtly switching the topic of conversation to the Chicago Bulls, Bears, and Cubs, we are likely to think of them as unresponsive, inflexible, and self-centered.

The world of relationships would be a simple place if building intimacy could solely be achieved based on reciprocating disclosures at matching levels of intimacy, positivity, and topicality. But the process of getting to know one another is a bit more complicated. For example, many believe that sharing their vulnerabilities with their lover is a part of the "romantic relationship script" and essential to intimacy. However, this type of self-disclosure might actually backfire! Instead of becoming closer, partners who share their vulnerabilities can become more insecure about their relationship (Lemay & Clark, 2008). Insecure partners who share their insecurities with a partner often believe it diminishes them in the eyes of their partner. This belief causes disclosers to discount the authenticity of their partner's assurances and to reject their affirmations. In the end, they can become even more insecure about their partner's regard (Lemay & Clark, 2008).

Another commonly shared misconception is that the disclosure of our values provides an effective way to reveal our innermost selves to a date or romantic partner. Ironically, our perception that value disclosure or revelation (e.g., "I think education is the most

powerful tool for ending poverty and discrimination”) will make a lasting impression on our dates is not supported by research (Pronin, Fleming, & Steffel, 2008). Those who receive value revelations do not find them to be especially useful or revealing. Why the disconnect? It seems that the intensity with which we hold our most cherished values leads us to add significance to their disclosure (Pronin et al., 2008). Although observers hear the revelation, they do not have access to the discloser’s affective link to the value. We will see a similar type of asymmetry of sender-receiver interpretations of self-disclosures in our discussion of individual differences.

Individual Differences in Self-Disclosure

Altman and Taylor’s (1973) social penetration model as well as Berg and Archer’s (1980, 1982) topical reciprocity model are to some extent idealizations of the self-disclosure process. Neither one takes into account important individual differences that can lead to considerable variations in how mutual self-disclosure unfolds.

Gender-Related Differences

Men and women are not alike when it comes to self-disclosure. Although both sexes are similarly willing to disclose their emotions, women tend to be more willing to disclose about feelings of depression, anxiety, anger, and their greatest fears (Rubin et al., 1980; Snell, Miller, & Belk, 1988). This general tendency of women to disclose more information of a more intimate nature is somewhat attenuated when they expect to interact with the recipient of their disclosure. Under these circumstances, women’s self-disclosures become less revealing and less intimate, whereas men’s self-disclosures become more revealing and intimate (Shaffer & Ogden, 1986). It appears that women avoid self-disclosure primarily to avoid personal hurt. When men avoid self-disclosure they often do so strategically—that is, to maintain control over their relationships (Rosenfeld, 1979).

Most of these sex differences are not so much related to gender per se, but more to differences in expectations of what constitutes proper behavior for men and women. U.S. culture has assigned women the role of socioemotional specialists. As a result, men and women alike expect females to disclose more than males. In support of this contention, men and women alike tend to rate males who fail to disclose as better adjusted than males who disclose information about personal problems. The opposite is true for perceptions of women who either disclose information about personal problems or fail to disclose it (Derlega & Chaikin, 1976). Furthermore, men who are particularly high in masculinity are less willing to disclose intimate information, especially to other men, but men with a more feminine orientation generally disclose more intimate information, spend more time doing it, and expect intimate disclosures in return, particularly when they are disclosing to a woman (Winstead, Derlega, & Wong, 1984).

Self-Monitoring

Regardless of gender, the degree to which people monitor their behavior in the context of a social situation has an impact on self-disclosure. In general, *high self-monitors* like to adapt their behavior to the demands of the current social situation. *Low self-monitors*, on the other hand, do relatively little in terms of modifying their behavior in light of

situational constraints (Snyder, 1987; Snyder & Gangestad, 1986). As a result, high self-monitors tend to look for cues about appropriate behavior by inspecting the behavior of others, and they tend to act differently when in different situations and with different people. Low self-monitors are guided more by their “true” attitudes, beliefs, and feelings, and they would be reluctant to change the way they do things just to please another. Not surprisingly, when asked to disclose personal information to another, high self-monitors are more prone to reciprocate the intimacy, emotionality, and descriptive content of another’s disclosure than low self-monitors are (Shaffer, Smith, & Tomarelli, 1982). Apparently, high self-monitors use the other’s lead to decide on what constitutes the proper level of self-disclosure.

Shaffer, Smith, and Tomarelli’s (1982) findings are certainly consistent with the generally hypothesized differences between low and high self-monitors. However, Ludwig, Franco, and Malloy (1986) found that low self-monitors followed the reciprocity norm more closely than high self-monitors, who always disclosed at a high level of intimacy regardless of their partner’s behavior. How can this apparent mystery surrounding these contradictory findings be resolved? One possibility is that differences in the ways high and low self-monitors reciprocate another’s self-disclosure may be influenced by whether they expect to interact with the other in the future. Remember that high self-monitors want to please others, perhaps with the ultimate goal of being liked. Thus, it may be that high self-monitors are particularly likely to reciprocate to another’s self-disclosure when they expect to have contact with that person in the future. To test this idea, one study (Shaffer, Ogden, & Wu, 1987) varied the prospect of future interaction along with an initially high or low level of disclosure intimacy. Results showed that high self-monitors reciprocated their partner’s self-disclosure only when they expected to meet that person again. This difference was not observed when there was no prospect of future interaction. Under these circumstances, both low and high self-monitors followed the reciprocity rule equally.

Self-Consciousness

A concept that appears superficially related to **self-monitoring** is **self-consciousness**. It describes our tendency to focus our attention inward—toward our feelings, goals, and values (e.g., “I want to be a rocket scientist”). Once we focus our attention on ourselves, we compare them with our current state. If we discover a large enough discrepancy (e.g., “I flunked all my physics courses”), we are likely to adjust our behavior so as to bring our current state more in line with our goals and values. Self-consciousness takes on two forms (Scheier & Carver, 1985). **Private self-consciousness** refers to our tendency to reflect on private aspects of ourselves—that is, the extent to which our behavior corresponds to how we would like to act. **Public self-consciousness** describes the extent to which we reflect on how we might appear in the eyes of others. Both types of self-consciousness can vary situationally. Seeing ourselves in the mirror or listening to a tape of our own voice generally raises our levels of both private and public self-consciousness. Additionally, there are chronic differences between people’s level of self-consciousness in the absence of such devices. Either way, heightened self-consciousness is hypothesized to lead to an inspection of our behavior and a subsequent adjustment of that behavior if necessary.

To date, research has shown that self-consciousness can affect self-disclosure in a couple of ways. One study (Archer, Hormuth, & Berg, 1982) shows that research

participants who were asked to disclose intimate information about themselves became more reluctant disclosers when they did the task while sitting in front of a mirror. Apparently, the increased public and private self-consciousness induced by the presence of the mirror made research participants watch more closely how their disclosures might compare with their own standards and the kind of impression they wanted to convey. With respect to reciprocity of self-disclosure, a slightly more complicated picture emerged from a study that looked at research participants who were either high or low on private and public self-consciousness (Shaffer & Tomarelli, 1989). Research participants who scored high on one aspect of self-consciousness and low on the other tended to reciprocate the level of intimacy of another's disclosure. Research participants who were uniformly low or high on both private and public self-consciousness did not follow the reciprocity norm to the same extent. Apparently, research participants who were concentrating on both aspects of the self had suffered from some sort of attentional overload that prevented them from paying attention to the level of intimacy of the other's self-disclosure.

Anxiety, Trust, and Machiavellianism

The number of personality dimensions on which people differ is almost endless. Consequently, a thorough treatment of how they might affect various aspects of the self-disclosure process might fill volumes. In the interest of brevity, the remaining discussion will focus on a few personality dimensions that are particularly obvious or particularly intriguing.

Not surprisingly, people who are highly anxious are concerned with self-protection. They feel vulnerable enough as it is and thus tend to disclose at a moderate rather than a high level of intimacy, regardless of whether the other person discloses information high or low in intimacy (Meleshko & Alden, 1993). This pattern of disclosure might be the result of self-protection or the result of self-perception processes. For instance, fear of rejection leads people to amplify the significance of their disclosures (Vorauer, Cameron, Holmes, & Pearce, 2003). That is, because of the internal struggle to get beyond their inhibitions (for example, fear and anxiety) in order to express themselves, people who fear rejection perceive their disclosures as having added meaning and extra import.

To the extent that some of the anxiety is tied to the face-to-face nature of an interaction, are socially anxious people helped by using online social sites, texting, and instant messaging? Do the reduced audiovisual cues of computer-mediated communication help overcome the inhibitions typically experienced in face-to-face interactions among those who are anxious? The evidence is a bit mixed. Although some (Schouten et al., 2007; Valkenburg & Peter, 2009) have reported findings that are consistent with this idea, others have painted a more nuanced picture. A study of 280 adolescents (Pierce, 2009) found that socially anxious participants who indicated they were not comfortable talking with others face-to-face preferred talking with others online or by text messaging. However, participants low in social anxiety with no issues related to talking with others had an easier time making friends online. Sex differences also emerged. Compared to males, females reported more social anxiety and feeling more comfortable interacting with others online or by text messaging.

People with a high level of generalized trust are in some ways the opposite of people who are socially anxious. Not surprisingly, they approach others without the notion

that they might get hurt and tend to reveal more information, especially information of an intimate nature (Wheeless & Grotz, 1977). Of course, a high level of interpersonal trust may be detrimental when one discloses to another who uses self-disclosure as a means of manipulating others for the purpose of interpersonal control. Rather than presenting an honest and accurate image of themselves, people with such Machiavellian tendencies disclose strategically to control the behavior of the other and ultimately their relationship (O'Connor & Simms, 1990). Interestingly, some researchers have reported this type of strategic self-disclosure to be prevalent among women (O'Connor & Simms, 1990), yet others have shown it to be more prevalent among men (Dingler-Duhon & Brown, 1987), suggesting that it is perhaps more a question of personality rather than gender.

Context Influences on Self-Disclosure

At this point, there is probably little doubt that self-disclosure is important for the initiation of close relationships, particularly those that are intimate in nature. However, this is by no means the only context in which self-disclosure takes place. Absence of self-disclosure, either by choice or for lack of opportunity, is associated with loneliness (Berg & Peplau, 1982; Davis & Franzoi, 1986). Males and females alike suffer from loneliness in the absence of opportunities to self-disclose to members of the opposite sex. However, a lack of self-disclosure to same-sex friends is associated with loneliness among women (Solano, Batton, & Parish, 1982).

To the extent that self-disclosure to friends and peers can buffer the possible effects of lack of self-disclosure to intimate partners, one might ask if self-disclosure in these types of relationships would perhaps unfold in different ways. After all, self-disclosure in ongoing friendships, for example, does not serve the purpose of getting to know one another. Rather, it appears that self-disclosure is volunteered for social support and coping (Pennebaker, 1989, 1995). From this point of view, one would not expect reciprocity to matter much. Consistent with this idea, it appears that intimacy of disclosure is most closely associated with friendship. It is important to note that it is the psychological closeness rather than the physical closeness of friends that is responsible for this relationship. We generally disclose intimate information to those who are psychologically close to us, whereas we disclose nonintimate information to those who are close in terms of their proximity (Rubin & Shenker, 1978).

Intimate self-disclosure to an acquaintance or even a stranger is considered to be inappropriate, which is perhaps one reason why we generally avoid it. In fact, people who violate this implicit norm are frequently perceived as maladjusted (Chaikin & Derlega, 1974). This does not mean we would never disclose intimate information to a stranger under any circumstance. If this were the case, most experimental studies of self-disclosure would have failed miserably and most daytime TV talk shows would have gone off the air long ago. Intimate self-disclosure to a stranger is more likely to occur when the stranger is physically attractive, especially in the absence of a strong need for approval (Brundage, Derlega, & Cash, 1977). Our transient moods further affect our willingness to disclose intimate information. People in good moods tend to be more willing to disclose intimate information, whereas people in bad moods are more reluctant to do so (Cunningham, 1988).

Finally, alcohol consumption seems to promote willingness to disclose personal information, especially for men. However, to some extent this is more due to how intoxicated people *believe* they are. In one study (Caudill, Wilson, & Abrams, 1987), men who believed that both they and their partner were drunk showed an increase in self-disclosure even when no alcohol was consumed. At the same time, women who believed they were drunk showed a decrease in self-disclosure. It may be that the women who believed they were drunk reminded themselves of their heightened vulnerability and thus decided to exercise caution.

Self-Disclosure in Mature Relationships

Advice columns in newspapers and magazines are filled with letters from spouses complaining that they and their partners do not talk anymore. Specifically, the common complaint is about the absence of intimate self-disclosure. The frequency with which such complaints are volunteered testifies to the importance of self-disclosure for marital satisfaction (Hendrick, 1981). However, that intimate self-disclosure would decrease with the length of relationship is not entirely surprising. After all, intimate self-disclosure is a means to get to know the other person. People in long-term relationships tend to know their partners fairly well and need little information to know how they feel about things (Rauers, Blanke, & Riediger, 2013). Consequently, in mature relationships there may simply be less need for self-disclosure. Then again, if this were true, one would expect fewer complaints about the lack of intimate self-disclosure on the part of long-term husbands and wives.

Most intact long-term relationships are not entirely devoid of intimate self-disclosure. However, compared to self-disclosure to a prospective date, there is a shift in terms of the type of intimate information that is disclosed. Relative to strangers, spouses tend to reveal more descriptive intimacy but less evaluative intimacy, although this is more pronounced for husbands than for wives, who prefer disclosures high in evaluative intimacy (Morton, 1978). Contrary to popular belief, there is little difference in terms of the sheer amount of information that husbands and wives disclose to one another. For both, the amount of information disclosed becomes less with age and with length of relationship (Antill & Cotton, 1987). This does not mean that people will necessarily become unhappy with their relationship over time. Instead, there is evidence that marital happiness is determined by the perceived discrepancy in the partner's affective disclosure. Marital satisfaction decreases as this discrepancy increases (Davidson, Balswick, & Halverson, 1983). The intent and valence of self-disclosure are equally important for marital satisfaction. Honest and positive self-disclosures result in more happiness than disclosures aimed at gaining control of the relationship (Dickson-Markman, 1984).

The picture of a mature relationship marked by a decrease in self-disclosure and a preponderance of self-disclosures high in descriptive intimacy can change quickly and dramatically in response to stressful events. People who are distressed tend to be preoccupied with their problems to the point where their thinking becomes overwhelmed by them. This can trigger a need to confide in others, spouses included (McDaniel, Stiles, & McGaughey, 1981). Such confessions often make people feel better because, by virtue of confiding in someone, they have transferred some aspects of their problem to the other

person (Pennebaker, 1990). Because the need to confide does not depend on where the stress comes from in the first place, this perspective suggests that self-disclosure, especially the type high in evaluative intimacy, may be especially prevalent in relationships that are marked by turmoil. Once the relationship stabilizes, one can expect a return to lower levels of self-disclosure high in descriptive intimacy.



Thinking Critically About Relationship Issues, Theories, and Research

- As a relationship develops we probably do not abandon the goal of making ourselves liked by the other person. Yet at some point we make the move from strategic communication specifically aimed at eliciting liking (self-presentation) to open communication (self-disclosure). What do you think helps prompt us to shift?
- One explanation for gender-related differences in self-disclosure is that women avoid self-disclosure in order to protect themselves, while men avoid it to maintain control over the relationship. In what ways do you think avoiding self-disclosure can help men maintain control of their relationships?
- Being deprived of opportunities to self-disclose to members of the opposite sex results in loneliness. Do you think this indicates the existence of a “need to self-disclose”? What other explanations could you generate for this link?
- People in good moods are more willing to disclose intimate information, while people in bad moods are reluctant to do so. What do you think causes this pattern of mood influences on self-disclosure?

Summary

Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do people increase their chances of maintaining attraction and interest? • How do they get to know one another? • How do couples manage self-disclosure?
Theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theories of self-presentation hold that people try to communicate a positive yet plausible image of themselves • Self-presentation tactics include self-descriptions, attitude expressions, attributional statements, compliance with social norms (e.g., decorum, modesty, behavioral matching, social associations, and changes in environment) • Balance between presenting a positive image while avoiding outright deceit • Two models of self-disclosure • Social penetration model emphasizes moving from superficial to intimate disclosures • Reciprocity model focuses on matching the level of intimacy in each other's disclosures

- Research**
- Nonverbal cues such as body posture, facial expression, touch, gaze, grooming, and gestures signal interest and are used in flirting (Patterson, 1987)
 - Breaking eye contact, closed body posture, not smiling, and not touching convey disinterest (McCormick & Jones, 1989)
 - Opening lines are crucial to initiating a relationship, with most people preferring innocuous or direct remarks over cute and flippant ones (Kleinke, Meeker, & Staneski, 1986)
 - Modesty—refusing credit for success and accepting responsibility for failure—can create a good impression (Miller & Schlenker, 1985)
 - Maintaining self-presentation depletes cognitive resources and diminishes our capacity for self-regulation; resource depletion may lead to paradoxical outcomes such as talking too much or too loud or saying embarrassing things (Vohs et al., 2005)
 - Trying hard to present oneself in a certain light requires a certain amount of suppression, and suppression can lead to a rebound and communicating the very things we are trying to hide (Wegner et al., 1987)
 - Online daters use self-presentation to manage their impressions: Men portray themselves as slightly taller than they are in reality, and women portray themselves as weighing slightly less (Toma et al., 2008)
 - Research on the social penetration model of self-disclosure suggests that breadth and depth of disclosure appear to increase at a somewhat different rate, with the rate of breadth changing faster than the rate of depth; also, there are substantial variations from one couple to the next
 - Research on the reciprocity model shows that reciprocating another's self-disclosure within the same topic and with the same level of intimacy and valence connotes sensitivity and likeableness
 - As relationships mature, the intimacy of self-disclosure does not decrease; instead, it increases in descriptive intimacy while it decreases in evaluative intimacy
 - A variety of individual differences, including gender, self-monitoring, self-consciousness, anxiety, trust, fear of rejection, and Machiavellianism, as well as differences due to the context in which self-disclosure takes place, influence the course and outcome of self-disclosure
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Key Terms

Self-presentation (sometimes also called *impression management*): behaviors aimed at creating a favorable yet plausible image of the self, with the goal of eliciting liking from another.

Self-presentation norms: constraints upon our self-presentations such as decorum, modesty, and behavioral matching.

Social penetration theory: the development of self-disclosure in terms of number of topics covered (breadth) and the personal significance of the topics (depth).

Self-disclosure reciprocity: a strategy in which people tend to match the other's self-disclosure in terms of intimacy and valence.

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Descriptive intimacy: aspect of self-disclosure through which people convey factual information.

Evaluative intimacy: aspect of self-disclosure through which people express strong emotions and judgments.

Topical reciprocity: sticking with the same topic in response to another self-disclosure.

Self-monitoring: a disposition that compels some people to adjust their behavior to the situation in order to manage their public image.

Self-consciousness: a disposition to focus our attention inward, toward our feelings, goals, and values.

Private self-consciousness: a disposition toward reflecting on whether our behavior corresponds to how we would like to act.

Public self-consciousness: a disposition toward reflecting on how we might appear in the eyes of others.