CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHridge

A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE
IN SELF-DISCLOSURE

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education, Educational Psychology, Counseling and Guidance

by

Myrna Kay Harper

June, 1980
The thesis of Myrna Kay Harper is approved:

Committee Chairman

California State University, Northridge
June, 1980
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the members of my committee for their valuable assistance, time and effort, and comments during the length of this thesis project. My thanks goes to Dr. A. Britton for his belief and trust in my ability and his assurance. Secondly, to Dr. D. McCafferty for his patience, guidance, and all those brief but cogent talks. Dr. J. Ferrell for his general support and his meaningful grammatical corrections.

A special thanks goes to Dr. B. Mehlman for his inspiration, stimulation, psychological assistance preceding as well as throughout the thesis, for without his help this work would have been just another paper.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter I: Theoretical Viewpoints</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter II: Experimental Findings</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyadic Effect</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Person</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age and Appropriateness</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality Characteristics</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture and Religious</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Dynamics</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter III: Five Perspectives of Self-Disclosure</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter IV: Measurements of Self-Disclosure</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter V: Conclusion</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laboratory vs. Field Studies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timing</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Review of the Literature In Self-Disclosure
Myrna Kay Harper
California State University, Northridge

Introduction
As researchers, we can understand people through observing their behavior or listening to their experiences. Observation has been relied upon almost exclusively in the field of research, since inner subjectivity is considered too difficult to measure. However, just because it seems to be a difficult task to measure internal experiences is not reason enough to disregard that experience.

One purpose of experimental psychology is to be able to reliably predict future behavior. Although some experimenters have successfully predicted some types of behavior, there is evidence indicating that predictions cannot always be based on prior observations. The more urgent purpose of experimental psychology is to find pragmatic solutions to social, psychological and philosophical quests. More specifically, in psychology to find variables that may successfully facilitate personal growth, minimize emotional pain, arrest mental stress and increase the effectiveness of interpersonal relationships. The essence of the quest is to identify specific characteristics that will help
people lead more healthy, satisfying, and productive lives. To more fully understand human beings we must probe deeper than the apparent behavior. We must look at people's motives, desires, aspirations, and needs. Humankind is more complex than public behavior suggests.

This paper attempts to understand people through some of their needs, exploring them more completely through internal processes, specifically through self-disclosure. The present paper is the product of the current research conducted by the leading proponents of self-disclosure. First it emphasizes the authors theoretical perspectives regarding self-disclosure. Then it identifies some of the contradictions, consistencies and shortcomings of these experimental findings. Lastly, it specifies some alternatives which may help guide further research.

Jourard proposes to evaluate the internal process through an index called "self-disclosure"—the process of making one's self known to another. He presented his theory about the process of self-disclosure in _The Transparent Self_ (1964). Along with many experiential findings (to be discussed in Chapter 3) he posits that, "When a man does not acknowledge to himself who, what and how he is, he is cut off from reality, and he will sicken." He continues, "...no man can come to know himself except as an outcome of disclosing himself to another person." (1964, p. 16) According to Jourard, sicken refers to
physical as well as emotional pathologies, such as psychosomatic ills, anxiety, depression, and maladies that range from those as mild as boredom to those as severe as psychosis. Jourard believes that one's mental health is directly correlated to how much one discloses. He feels that it is essential for one's well-being to intimately share with at least one significant other.

Through self-disclosure we have the potential to delve into another's private world. When an individual shares parts of himself that were previously closed off, he has the opportunity to develop an encounter that can ultimately lead to intimacy. Intimacy can lead to meaningful contact with significant others, resulting in a spiraling effect. Understanding and knowing others may help us know ourselves better. Self-disclosure may serve as a bridge between alienation and involvement. Perhaps intimacy is a common denominator among many variables: encounter, communication, involvement, and even love. Intimacy is one antidote for the alienation, isolation and loneliness that plague our generation. The evidence that intimacy is infrequent is reflected in the writings of a number of psychologists (e.g. Bettleheim, Horney, Fromm, and Buber).

The recent interest in personal growth movements such as Esalen, Primal therapy, and EST show that individuals today are seeking contact as well as understanding.
The amount of money spent on personal growth per year can attest to the needs of many. Most psychologists can verify that clients' major complaints stem from feelings of despair, loneliness and anxiety. Another indication that self-disclosure is a desirable goal in interpersonal relationships is reflected through the lyrics of our music. A recent, popular song approaches this subject directly,

"If you search for truthfulness you might as well be blind, as it seems so hard to give. Honesty's such a lonely word, everyone is so untrue. Honesty is hardly ever heard and mostly what I need from you." (B. Joel, 1979)
Chapter I: Theoretical Viewpoints

Some psychologists, sociologists, and philosophers (Fromm, Forisha and Jourard, Horney, Sartre, Freud, Bettelheim and Buber) agree that self-disclosure reduces anxiety, neurosis, fear and alienation from self and others. Although each of these professionals refer to the phenomena by terms as varied as: productive love, androgeny, the real self, facing one's self, free associations, involvement, I-thou relationship, or even self-disclosure itself, they all describe a similar process. Throughout this study, sharing, transparency, communication, revealing, and expression will be considered elements of self-disclosure and used synonymously.

Fromm refers to the alienated individual as the "socially patterned defect." (1947 and 1955) His remedy was productive love. He refers to the productive individual as giving of himself freely, opening up emotionally and verbally. This self-giving leads to understanding and intimacy, is equivalent to our understanding of the process of self-disclosure.

Forisha (1978) and Jourard (1971b) allude to man's instrumental role in society verses the women's expressive role as the possible cause of some male deaths. Actuarial
tables show that men die eight years younger than women. Forisha speculate that as long as man suppresses his emotionality, his verbal and expressive side will continue to suffer, taking a heavy toll. That is, if man does not begin to express his internal side, he will continue to suffer from high stress situations and perhaps early death. An avenue of self-disclosure can open men to being androgenous, fluctuating back and forth between being expressive and instrumental. Another implication, important in the area of psychotherapy has to do with training students. The question arises whether androgenous individuals would be more curative therapists.

Horney (1936) advocates that a central conflict in all neurosis stems from the "real self" sparring with the "idealized self." She postulates that when an individual maintains an idealized self he is in truth alienated from his real self. Jourard concurs and both feel that the pathologies that arise from such alienation are anxiety, depression, boredom, and fatigue. Horney suggests that through spontaneity and self expression individuals can become their real selves.

Sartre, (1967), a philosopher, argues that fear and anxiety arise from the individual that isn't true to himself. He claims that until one faces one's self he is condemned to suffering. Facing one's self, or being true to one's self, can begin by the process of verbally re-
vealing yourself to another.

Freud (1924) also recognized that symptoms occurred from repressed emotions. When a person repressed himself long enough, the repression became a defense system, so that the emotions were no longer recognized as part of the person. To combat such repression he employed the technique of free associations. Free associations are nothing more than an individual baring his soul to another, or in other words disclosing himself freely. Freud found that through this process the individual released those pent-up emotions, and symptoms decreased. His work strongly suggest he favored self-disclosure. Although he attempted to elicit self-disclosure in the therapeutic session from his clients, he objected to therapist self-disclosure.

Bettleheim (1960) in addressing the problem of isolation believed that bringing human beings back into involvement with their work and relationship with employers and others would alleviate some of their psychological stress. One could hypothesize that self-disclosure would be a viable solution to a non-involving relationship between employer-employee. Bettleheim's book The Informed Heart attacks the issue of alienation from a sociological perspective, nonetheless the implications for disclosure are clear--people need people.

Buber (1937) is well known for coining the term "I-
"I-thou relationship"—an intimate relationship that results from deep, personal, significant moments with another person. The only alternative he saw to this relationship was the "I-it relationship which perpetuates alienation." Transparency is tantamount to an "I-thou relationship".

There is more than one side to the story, and after investigating the benefits of self-disclosure, many questions arose about possible detrimental effects of the process. Weiner (1978) gives a thorough discourse on the opposite perspective on the effects of self-disclosure in the therapeutic setting. His comments and research reflect different conclusions than most of the present literature. He derives his findings from his own research, as well as his experience with clients. His two major assertions about disclosure in the therapeutic relationship are: (1) too much therapist honesty (high levels of therapist disclosure) can impede the client's ability to progress and, (2) therapist self-disclosure as an outlet for his own emotional problems is not only irrelevant to therapy but is detrimental to the client's progress. Weiner's findings seem to corroborate Carkhuff and Truax (1964) findings that both low and high levels of genuineness interfered with the therapeutic process. Chaikin and Derlega (1974) also agree with Weiner on this issue as they had discovered a curvilinear relationship existed between the amount of self-disclosure and
personality adjustment. Weiner uses these findings coupled with his experimental observations as validations for his view that too much or too little disclosure is inappropriate and evidence of maladjustment. Jourard (1964), Chelune (1975), Culbert (1973), and Cozby (1973), have found that this relationship exists but do not agree with all his conclusions. We should keep in mind that appropriateness of disclosure may vary in the therapeutic session, from the social situation.

Another pertinent question was proposed by Cozby (1973). He asked when it is appropriate to be private in a relationship and with whom. When does self-disclosure impede friendship, closeness, and future relationships? Common sense tells us some privacy is healthy but just how much has not been established. Simmel (1964) found that if marital couples communicated everything to one another they had difficulties in their relationship. Privacy seems to be necessary condition of living, and the literature has not represented it adequately. Altman and Taylor (1973) confront this issue openly, expressing the fears about minimizing our freedom when we ignore privacy. There are times when one chooses to be quiet and reserved and it would be neurotic to continually express oneself. Privacy has not been examined carefully, and more research into privacy will likely reflect on the process of self-disclosure.
There also seems to be some negative side effects in group settings according to Yalom (1974). He found that when one member compulsively, and neurotically self-reveals, he can act to alienate others who are less ready to reveal themselves. Transparency is not a "good" per se but depends on many environmental cues, such as timing of the disclosure. If one expresses himself too soon, as in the group setting, anxiety can come up in others about their inability to open-up. They may feel forced to conform before they are ready, or even leave the group to avoid these pressures.

Self-disclosure in a social setting may differ from self-disclosure in a therapeutic setting as alluded to earlier, both Jourard (1971a) and Cozby (1973) maintain. As we review the literature we should consider the environments from which we are to extrapolate. Is it more or less appropriate to disclose in a therapeutic setting than a social situation? Different factors are relevant in psychotherapy that are not operative in a social situation (Goldstein and Reinecker 1974).

The following is a brief outline of some of the benefits of self-disclosure as stipulated by or inferred from this paper. The possible benefits are as far reaching optimally as: (1) self-awareness (knowing one's self better), (2) less alienation from self and others (others knowing you better), (3) increased intimacy (the capability
of closeness with a significant other), (4) ability to love your self and others, and be loved in return, (Mehlman 1961), (5) self-actualization, (6) reality-testing (the ability and opportunity to check your understanding of self with others), and (7) psychological freedom, (the ability to understand, know and cope with anxiety, loneliness and fear). Fringe advantages attained, in need of more research and verification are: decreased somatic ills (fatigue, respiratory ailments, headaches), prolonging life linked with high stress, increased interpersonal relationships as an outgrowth of knowing one's self and others better, and lastly, an increase in self-esteem. One gains self-esteem commensurate with the amount of control one has over one's physical and mental life.

If we are to get a clearer perspective on the benefits and shortcomings of self-disclosure we will have to answer many more questions about the nature of disclosure, and its effects. It would aid us in having a rigorous theoretical background to determine where, why and what we are seeking, before even developing a design. Until we understand the philosophical underpinnings, results will continue to be ambiguous.
Chapter II: Experimental Findings

In the following review of the literature the research that is presented is as up to date as possible, except in cases where no research has replaced the original findings, or the contribution was too meaningful to be omitted. Jourard's earlier work is included because of his great contribution to the field, regardless of year of publication. For further review, see Cozby (1973), Chelune (1978), Chaikin and Derlega (1974b) and Goldstein and Reinecker (1974).

The ensuing leading subtopics that affect the process of self-disclosure are gender, age, and appropriateness, "dyadic effect", cultural and religious differences, personality characteristics, target person, family dynamics and miscellaneous findings. These subtopics overlap into other categories at times: sex findings may be found under age, the determination was arbitrary.

Some of the inquiries were not done under the specific title of self-disclosure; nevertheless the findings have serious implications for the process of self-disclosure. For instance, family structural theorists explain the dynamics of interactions between parents and siblings; their limitations and expectations. The communication
theorists inform us that the content of what is said is not as important as the how, what and why of what is communicated. Such findings are similar to those in the field of self-disclosure, and give us a richer framework from which to work.

While reviewing this literature it would be helpful to keep in mind the different types of disclosures. Generalizations are only valuable if they are referring to similar situations, quantity and quality of disclosers. Differences exist in self-disclosure in relation to subject matter. Jourard (1971a) identified two types of subject matter: (1) non-intimate or informational data such as hobbies, tastes, interests or, (2) intimate data regarding significant details about one's sex life, financial status, and one's body or feelings concerning one's body. He found that individuals disclose more about non-intimate information than intimate information. These differences can bias our views if they are not identified in the research we review. For example, high self-disclosure about a non-intimate subject matter will not have the same meaning or carry the same weight if extrapolated to intimate matters.

A similar distinction was drawn by Culbert (1973), who differentiated between non-self and real-self data. Non-self data may be impersonal statements about theoretical ideas, other than one's own, abstract thoughts, and
irrelevant information. He postulated that real-self data (intimate, personal information) aids in self-acceptance, hence greater self-involvement. He did his research in self-acceptance, and found that individuals that give nonself data as a way of communicating had difficulty attaining acceptance from others, and consequently, themselves (a form of self-alienation). Jourard's connotation of self-disclosure does not include this secondary type of disclosure, nonself data, and it is important to be aware of this distinction in interpreting his findings.

In Cozby's review (1973), he identified three types of dimensions that are also different ways of evaluating self-disclosure: (1) the amount of information, (2) the intimacy of the information, and (3) the duration or intensity of the data. Later, Chelune (1978) added two other dimensions: (4) affective manner of presentation, and (5) self-disclosure flexibility. All of these dimensions offer different perspectives on self-disclosure, therefore caution is urged in making generalizations.

Gender

One of the most consistent findings affecting self-disclosure emerged under the heading "Gender". Jourard and Lasakow (1958) found that women disclose more than men. Others have supported this finding: Hood and Back
(1971), Jourard (1964), Littlefield (1974), Cash (1975), and Mulcahy (1973). Several others maintain they found no significant difference; Cozby (1973) and Brooks (1974). However, the majority of the literature still suggest that women disclose more than men. Other variables have been discovered that may intervene in the sexual relationship, as well as in other sub-topics; the target person, status, age, attractiveness, gaze, distance, family setting, content of what is said, and situational factors. Some of the evidence that denies the original findings may have to be carefully assessed as to whether these factors did in fact alter the findings. New experiments crossed with these variables will give us more powerful designs and therefore cleaner, clearer results. Rosenfeld and Civikly and Herron (1978) suggest focusing on the psychological sex, in addition to the anatomical sex. Some men may be more androgenous, as Forisha suggests, and confound these findings. Kleinke and Kahn (1978), in five different experiments, found that women were accepted by other subjects when they were high disclosures in all topics, except competitiveness, while men that were high self-disclosures were not accepted on any topics. It seems to imply that we have stereotyped men into non-disclosing roles, and women into disclosing roles.

"Dyadic Effect"
Another important and reliable finding that has practical implications for the effectiveness in psychotherapy is that of the "dyadic effect", or "reciprocity effect". The amount of disclosure on the part of the experimenter has been found to facilitate more disclosure on the part of the subject. Several studies have replicated this finding; Jourard and Resnick (1970), Ehrlich and Craeven (1971), Jourard (1959), Jourard and Richman (1963), and Chittick and Himmelstein (1967).

Three theories have been suggested to explain the reciprocity effect. Trust-attraction theory hypothesizes that when an individual trusts and is drawn to another person he is more likely to disclose to him, most of the research, especially of Jourard's followed this belief. The social exchange theory is attaining the most support currently, postulates that the more often one's behavior rewards the behavior of another, the more often the other produces the behavior. The third explanation, modeling is simple emulation, and is considered as part of the attraction-trust theory too. All three are probably operative to some extent, and interact with one another. Chaikin and Derlega (1974b) and Thibault and Kelley (1959) found the exchange theory to be valid, Derlega and Chaikin and Herron (1973) and Thase and Page (1977) found the modeling theory to be operative. Some contrary findings were found by Cody and Rosson (1974) claiming that they
can find no such effect in the therapeutic session. It may be worth investigating the effects on the reciprocity when influenced by drugs, attractiveness, gaze and affect of the individual in the dyad. Rubin (1975) disagrees with laboratory findings, stating that the dyadic effect doesn't remain constant in the field (see Chapter 5).

**Target Person**

A finding with powerful ramifications for the family as well as interpersonal relationships is the role of the target person. It has been discovered that both men and women disclose more to their spouse than to any other target person, Jourard (1964), followed by closest friend, mother and father. In the marital literature, Burke, Weir, and Harrison (1976) found that wives tend to express more than husbands. Others found similar results (Jourard, 1971a, and Wolff 1976). Late adolescents and college students confide about as much to friends as they do to family members, as found by Jourard (1971a) and Komarowsky (1974). Subjects that revealed more about themselves perceived their parents as nurturing and supportive, Goldstein and Reinecker (1974) and Komarovsky (1974). There appears to be a change in the target person of whom one discloses to during a life span. There is very little literature on adolescence disclosure, or family interactions (see family dynamics), but some researchers found increased amounts of
self-disclosure form early to late adolescence with peers. Self-disclosure may in fact remain constant over the years, but shift from family members to friends, and ultimately to spouse; Goldstein and Reinbecker (1974, p. 55), assert, "There appears to be a consistent amount of self-disclosure made by individuals, and as there is an increase in disclosure to one target, there is a decrease in disclosure to another target." Levinger (1967) found that satisfied couples confided more to one another than dissatisfied couples.

An interesting finding by Colwill and Perlman (1972) suggest, on closer examination, that males disclose to a stranger more than an acquaintance. This contradicts the gender findings that men don't disclose. It appears that they may disclose to strangers more than to friends. The old cliche that one can open up to a stranger on a plane may have some merit.

Age and Appropriateness

Age is a variable affecting self-disclosure, and birth order seems to fall logically under this topic too. Late borns express less than first borns (Dimond and Hellkamp 1969). Jourard hypothesized that we disclose less to our parents as we age, and increase our communications with our spouse (Jourard, 1971a). Henry and Cummings (1959) findings are consistent with Jourard's, that we do
disclose less as we age to our parents. Cummings found that subjects disclose less as they age, if this bears out it may have serious implications for the aged, and the whole field of gerontology. Burke, Weir and Harrison (1976) support this belief through their findings with professional couples. They discovered that they communicate less as they get older as well as the longer they are married. Chaikin and Derlega (1974c) found that the age, status, and familiarity of a target person influences the appropriateness of what is shared. They found that intimate self-disclosure to a younger target, a lower status target, and a stranger were seen as more inappropriate than self-disclosure to a similar age, equal status, and non-stranger target. It is difficult to isolate age findings without considering the other factors, such as gender, status, target person, environmental situation and timing. The interactive effect of these variables is obvious.

The appropriateness of transparency is a determining factor in the age findings. In an experiment with male subjects Jones and Archer (1976) results indicated that a subject was evaluated as most liked when he shared personal information either to the other subjects or to the participants (confederates) in the experiment rather than talk about impersonal information or remain quiet. Subjects were briefed in the beginning of the experiment
as to the confederates' personal problems. Kleinke (1978) outlines several factors in assessing whether a disclosure is appropriate. The timing of the disclosure seems to be a consideration in how others perceive it—the beginning of an interaction is viewed differently than the end. Male subjects who confessed to another male confederate that their girlfriends were pregnant were given a significantly less favorable evaluation when they shared the information at the beginning of an interaction than at the end, Wortman and al. (1976). Presumably the subjects followed some unwritten law that there is a natural and personal progression in a given relationship, and if one shares himself at the beginning of a session, then he isn't really choosing the other as a friend but as a sounding board. This relates to both timing and motives for the disclosure. Chaikin and Derelega (1974c) found that men and women assessed a woman as appropriately disclosing to a friend, but less appropriate if disclosing to a stranger, as may be expected. Altman and Taylor (1973) argue that relationships develop in a systematic fashion and individuals expect these developmental stages. Who the disclosure is aimed at is also a determining factor. As stressed in the above findings, strangers and friends both receive and expect different levels of confidence.

The topic or content of the disclosure is also considered in its evaluation since societal norms are expected
to be maintained. Derelega, Harris and Chaikin (1973) discovered that female subjects liked a disclosing woman confederate slightly better than another woman confederate when she revealed that her mother caught her in a sexual encounter with a boyfriend. However, the woman confederate was liked significantly less if the encounter was with a girlfriend. Specific norms are expected to be upheld and deviations from these norms are viewed and judged as negative (Goldstein and Reinecker, 1974).

**Personality Characteristics**

Jourard intuitively attempted to equate mental health or personal well-being with high levels of self-disclosure. However, according to Cozby (1973), no correlation has been found greater than .50. Yet Cozby favors Jourard's hypothesis because "the individual who never disclosed may be unable to establish close relationships with others." (1973, p. 78). At this time the findings seem to be too ambiguous to suggest any significant relationship between the two.

Chelune (1978) clarifies why some of the results in the personality characteristics findings may be confounded. Fundamentally methodological paradigms are trait-based (patterns that are stable across situations), and little attention is paid to state-based modalities (patterns that fluctuate across situations). Trait-based patterns may
exist for some personality types, but to ignore state-based patterns is like admitting that there is only one personality type. Of course, we as psychologists recognize that there are different patterns too.

With so much emphasis on trait-based patterns, dogmatic perspectives arise and a lack of flexibility in evaluating investigation can hinder our understanding. Even in spite of this shortcoming, some investigators have found some positive correlations. However, we should consider whether these findings emerge when looked at from a state-based modality. Several experimenters found that there is a relationship between disclosure and locus of control (Rotter, 1966, 1971). Ellison and Firestone (1974) found that internals disclose more intimate information than externals, presumably because internals (inner-directed) feel more in control of the outcome of their environment than externals (other-directed). Externals are very sensitive to negative cues and will alter their verbal accessibility according to their cues. Ryckman, Sherman and Burgess (1973) found similar results, externals disclose less, and they hypothesize that their lack of communication is due to feelings of powerlessness or futility.

Other findings in the personality characteristic literature are the relationship between social health and mental health. As would be expected, no relationship
exists between neuroticism and social or personality adjustment, Jourard (1971a), Shapiro (1968), Stanley and Brownes (1966), Mayo (1968). Jourard (1971a) and Mullaney (1964) found social introversion paired with low disclosure. A post correlation was found between self-esteem and disclosure, utilizing the Tennessee self-concept device. Kopstein and Kopstein (1973) found subjects with a high need for social approval disclose less than those that didn't rely on approval. These findings suggest that low self-disclosure is equated with some maladjustment, while a moderate amount of self-disclosure is perceived as "normal". These findings tend to corroborate the locus of control findings, as other-directed individuals disclose less than inner-directed individuals.

On the other hand, subjects that were high self-revealers are also perceived as impulsive, according to Kipnis and Goodstadt (1970) and Burhenne and Mirel (1970). Vosen (1966) also found that others self-esteem decreased after participating (high disclosures) in an exercise using the Tennessee Self-Concept scale. For the time being, statements about mental health and the degree of self-disclosure as positive must be expressed with caution. We must first control for situational determinants, as well as methodological models before determining if high disclosure is truly a sign of good mental health as Jourard suggests. Perhaps, as Goldstein and Reinecker
suggest, levels of self-disclosure can be viewed as a process of interaction rather than a personality construct.

Culture and Religious Factors

Cultural and religious studies seem to be on the wane, but a few interesting findings have emerged. Blacks disclose less than whites (Jourard and Lasakow, 1958). Mexican-Americans disclose less than blacks (Littlefield, 1968), and Lewin (1948) found that Americans disclose more than Germans. Nationality differences were found between English and Puerto Rican co-eds, and both samples were found to give lower self-disclosure to their significant others than an American sample. Melikian's (1962) results indicated the same held true in the Far East, that is, Americans disclose more than the Easterners. It appears that Americans disclose more to significant others than any other nationality, including Latins, in spite of their Latin reputation for being affectionate. Jourard (1961) found some religious differences between the Jewish and the Baptist, Methodist and Catholic males. Jews were more disclosing. Jennings (1971) corroborated these findings.

Family Dynamics

Several self-disclosure findings seem to be corroborated by the theoretical and clinical findings of Minuchen
(1974) and Satir (1972) as well as many other family theorists. Structural family theory as presented by Minuchin confirms the experimental findings regarding the curvilinear relationship between personality adjustment and level of self-disclosure in the family context as well as outside the family. He recognized three subsystems operating within the family: (1) spousal, (2) parental, and (3) siblings. Imaginary boundaries are respected in a healthy functioning family between these subsystems. In a malfunctioning family you might see these boundaries confused and overlapped. For example, if a mother disclosed what would be considered appropriate in a spousal system to her son, she could invalidate her son's own system with her, the parental system. According to the theory, it is an inappropriate confidence and the child cannot discriminate between his role as a son or a pseudo-husband/father substitute. Consequently, communications break down between established and expected systems and it will more than likely create confusion. On the other hand, if the mother is too rigid in her role and doesn't express her feelings to her son, this also can have adverse effects on his growth. The child can grow distant from her and report feelings of isolation. It appears that a curvilinear relationship exists, that is, too much disclosure or too little disclosure is seen as inappropriate in the family setting, too, and maladjustment
can occur at either of the extremes. Again, we see that the target person to whom we disclose and the amount we disclose are important in evaluating disclosure.

Another clinician, Satir (1972), suggests a subtly different approach within the communication theory of family dynamics. She postulates that children who are identified as patients (ostensibly problem children) are a result of dysfunctional family communications which are directly related to incongruent messages. Incongruent messages are communications that are unclear and have two meanings; that is, a verbal message that doesn't match the non-verbal message, putting the receiver in a double-bind (no-win situation). Her observations have implications about the content of what is being said and has practical meaning for the effectiveness of interpersonal interactions. Unless disclosures are certain kinds, "congruent", forthright, and direct, disclosure is not necessarily valuable and may even be perceived as detrimental.

More experimental findings, such as Abelman (1976), found that mutual disclosure occurs within families. Skypeck (1967) found that children disclose to their parents fairly often in elementary school and start increasing disclosure to peers and siblings at this age. Komarosky (1974) and Rivenbark (1971) also verified Jourard's results that children communicated more to their mothers than fathers. However, Wiebe and Williams (1972) couldn't
replicate the results. They found that the assertion held true for girls but not for boys. Boys communicated equally as often with fathers as mothers. It is obvious that the clinicians' findings regarding family dynamics could have some striking implications about the role self-disclosure plays in interpersonal relationships and the patterns and habits we develop as children. Hopefully, further research will shed some light on the process of self-disclosure in real life settings.
Chapter III:

Five Perspectives of Self-Disclosure

In evaluating all the studies presented, we need to consider five parameters identified by Cozby and Chelune. They state that confusion arises from interpretations regarding differing amounts of information, the quality of intimacy and the duration of disclosure, as discussed in Chapter 3. The two other dimensions we outlined are the affective manner of presentation and self-disclosure flexibility. Affective manner of self-disclosure is not just what the subject or client says, but how he says it. Yalom (1975) addresses this issue, remarking that if one views just the content of what is being said, he may be misguided and miss important meta-messages. One can possibly recall from one's own experience an instance when he said something with specific emphasis that without that emphasis wouldn't be taken in the same way. For example, "I make as much money as the next guy" can take on numerous meanings depending on the intent and motivation of the speaker. The emphasis may have been sarcastic, modest, trying to conform, or even direct and truthful. Looking not only at what is said, but at the context of what is said, and possibly to whom, we can get a more thorough
Self-disclosure flexibility is a controversial dimension posed by experimenters recently. Chelune suggests that some individuals have more flexible patterns of disclosure (state-based) than others. That is, the subjects disclose more or less depending on the situation, target person and time. This was substantiated by numerous studies reviewed earlier. The curvilinear relationship Chaitkin and Derlegha (1974b) found will have to be re-examined. The curvilinear modality represents subjects that have fixed, rigid patterns of disclosure. Perhaps their findings with high and low extremes of disclosure will have to be reviewed looking at the situations. High disclosure is certainly not maladaptive across the board. Yalom (1975) found that high levels of self-disclosure imbued the client with popularity. Obviously this issue is in need of further investigation.

Besides these considerations about reviewing the literature, new factors are continually merging to be investigated. Such elements as, for example, personal attractiveness, temporal adjustment and status confound results and mislead experimenters and others into making false inferences from the research. For example, in the area of gender, we can watch for the age, attractiveness of the subjects, gaze, and distance between the subjects and experimenter and the appropriateness of the disclosure
when designing new experiments. With the abundant amount of research behind us as a guide, the second generation of research can begin to develop more complex designs that reflect a deeper level of self-disclosure.

Another obstacle that needs continued control is the experimental bias. It has been found that experimenters behave differently depending on their hypothesis. Although Rosenthal (1967) has warned us about the experimental influence, self-disclosure research seems to have been particularly vulnerable to this type of fault. Perhaps the problem came from the subjective role of the measurement and techniques. Inevitably the fact of the experimenter's subjectivity introduces a bias into the data but without the subjectivity findings may have a more behavioral result. It would seem to be important to include both the subjective element in studies such as to maximize the information gained, while minimizing loss of objective data. This has been remedied to some extent in the 1970's. The strong belief system of the experimenter, however, still seems to permeate the research and we will have to continue to be more cautious in the future.
Chapter IV:
Measurements of Self-Disclosure

Reviewing the specific measurements that were utilized in most of the investigations will give us an intelligible picture of the problems that arise from instrumentation. The several variations on some of the instruments that were fundamentally similar were omitted for the sake of brevity and simplicity. The criteria demonstrated are the most popular measurements in use. There are three types of judgment criteria used in measuring self-disclosure: (1) self-reports, a subjective scale, (2) observational ratings, a quasi-objective scale, and (3) an objective metric, an objective measurement of self-disclosure behavior.

Jourard's Self-Disclosing Questionnaire (JSDQ), Jourard and Lasakow (1958), has been the most popular self-reporting instrument in all the literature. The JSDQ consists of 60 items within six different categories: tastes, work, money, personality, body and hobbies, each represented 10 times. Each subject scores the items according to the extent that he talked to a specific target person (mother, father, male friend, female friend, and spouse). 0, 1, 2 and X represent the degree of the
disclosure—none, generally, fully, or lied/misrepresented self. The JSDQ defines self-disclosure as the past disclosure to a specific target person on a given set of topics. Jourard and Resnick (1970) have developed a newer 40 item questionnaire that incorporates questions to the subject about his past, future and present behavior as well as identifying one more target person, the stranger. The Carkhuff scale, the Q-sort, and Polansky's sentence completion are other self-report measures. Chelune (1976) has developed a newer self-report measure. His Self-Disclosing Survey Situational (SDSS) incorporates the environmental setting as a variable along with the interpersonal variables. He maintains the same four target persons as Jourard, but also varies the levels of intimacy from low to high, and in some cases varies the social situation (school, work, home, etc.). The SDSS is a simple 20 item inventory asking subjects to identify both the target person and level of intimacy in a specific situation that the subjects would choose. The SDSS defines self-disclosure as the past and predicted disclosures to a specific target person in a given situation. He found that subjects' relationship with a target is a better predictor of subjects' behavior than is the intimacy of the situation.

Basic to all these subjective measures are the self-expressions revealed by a subject about his own feelings
and/or behavior. However, Chelune (1978) and Cozby (1973) found that the JSDQ measures only what a subject did in the past, not what he is doing or will do in the future. Other researchers, Erhlich and Graeven (1971), also have not been able to find a relationship between the JSDQ and actual disclosure in a situation. Conclusions about the findings utilizing the JSDQ will have to be limited to evaluating the subject's past behavior. Chelune designed the SDSS, as mentioned above, to hopefully minimize this effect, that is, to find out what subjects do presently and predict future behavior as well as past behavior.

Although new attempts are made to improve instrumentation, some of the weaknesses of measurement come from people's nature, not mechanics. The inherent problem in a subjective measure is the possibility of intent to deceive by the subject. If a subject wants to successfully deceive us, he can alter his behavior (e.g., words he chooses as well as deliberately misrepresenting his world). Rosenthal (1967) discusses this shortcoming in detail. Not only can the subject willfully misrepresent himself as Golstein and Reinecker (1974) mention, he is not always aware of all aspects of his behavior to adequately report what is true. There is no question that with subjective reports, we have a dual issue, relying on the subject's memory and their willingness to cooperate. We must use
caution at all times in evaluating and extrapolating our hypotheses until we can do more candid research and field studies. But, realistically, we can never know exactly what another feels unless he chooses to tell us.

Other major problems with self-reports are that they have been pen and pencil inventories rather than vis-a-vis encounters. The use of video tapes and recorders in face-to-face studies may aid us in viewing "actual self-disclosure" instead of reports. However, there is very little research that utilizes this method. We tend to think this strategy may be too time consuming as well as expensive. Although the expense of recording and video filming is prohibitive, the occasional use of films and perhaps tapes could provide data which can shed some light on the problems and issues, at leisure, first hand.

The observational ratings are the ratings of a target person, like the parents, spouse, peer, or teacher, who assesses the quantity and quality of the subject's disclosure. These measurements have been used successfully as sociometric procedures, but have not been found to correlate with self-reports, Himelstein and Lubin (1965). Until we have similar operational definitions regarding the process of self-disclosure itself, it may prove futile to search for a relationship between the different measurements. Yet correlations between how people view their own self-disclosure and how others view it and how self-
disclosure measures as a behavior would tell us something about the nature of self-disclosure. Even if we don't find a relationship, that is knowledge about the process and perhaps an element of reality we will have to contend with.

Objective metrics (Chelune, 1976) evaluates disclosure from the researcher's perspective. There are two distinct categories of this criteria; (1) the amount of information disclosed (measured by the number of words used), and (2) the duration of the disclosure (measured by the amount of time spent disclosing). Burhenn and Mirel (1970) used the first system, amount of information, by measuring the number of words a subject used in an essay. The more widely used criteria, duration of disclosure, was best illustrated in the work of Vondracek (1969) who measured length of verbalizations.

Objective metrics may be a more precise method of measuring behavior than self-reports or observational ratings, but what we gain in precision, we may lose in meaning. If the operational definition of self-disclosure is broken down into parts, they may really be measuring something else besides self-disclosure. The sum of the whole may not be the same as its parts. For example, there is a question as to whether the amount one speaks is indicative of self-disclosure behavior. Yalom (1975) mentioned a loquacious client who in spite of his excess
talking avoided any meaningful disclosure. Recalling Jourard's two types of disclosure, intimate and non-intimate, reminds us that the quality of the disclosure is not the same as the amount. Block and Goldstein (1971, p. 595) refer to this issue:

"...duration of utterances would seem to bear no necessary theoretical or empirical relationship to the quantity or quality of self-disclosure."

So several points should be considered when utilizing the objective metric system. What type of disclosure are you referring to? What is the quality perceived in relation to the quality in actuality? Chelune (1978, p. 246) who is in favor of objective metrics, cautions us, "...much of our knowledge about self-disclosure may be an artifact of the measurement perspective used."

Each criteria is taken from a different perspective, a different operational definition. Perhaps they are in reality measuring different variables.

In summary, the problem with instrumentation and the confounding issues outlined by Cozby and Chelune make it impossible at present to generalize about self-disclosure. It would be most meaningful to assess self-disclosure multi-dimensionally rather than uni-dimensionally. The complexity of the measure would be more likely to reflect upon the process of self-disclosure and make the value of findings more significant. Where it is not possible to use multi-dimensional parameters, it would be advisable to
limit generalizations about self-disclosure.
Chapter V: Conclusion

Since the beginning of research starting with Jourard (1958) in the field of self-disclosure many changes have occurred. New instruments have been developed—subjective reports as well as objective measures, Chelune (1976). The focus of investigations have shifted from the internal process to specific self-disclosing behaviors, and correlations between the two have been attempted. As mentioned above, factors now being taken into account are: situational factors, target persons, gender, status, attractiveness, timing, physical characteristics of environment, person, proximity and gaze of disclosures. However, studies continue to be ambiguous, and several areas demand considerable attention and further experimentation. The following will provide some information regarding controlling future investigations and provide a light on one small spot of the literature.

Laboratory vs. Field Study

Much of the research mentioned has been based on data gathered in the laboratory rather than in the field; little research has actually been conducted in therapeutic environments, social settings, and homes. Extrapolating
from one situation, laboratory conditions, might prove to be misleading, and consequently lead to teaching unwarranted principles about interpersonal relationships, therapeutic strivings, and family relationships. Rubin (1975) found that laboratory findings differ from field findings, people reported different experiences in the field than in his laboratory. Investigations in real life settings may prove fruitful. Family settings, social situations and therapeutic situations need to be explored separately to reveal similarities as well as differences. What, when and where are they the same and/or different. Chaikin and Derlega (1974a) found low and high self-disclosure both inappropriate, yet Yalom (1975) seems to think high self-disclosure can be valuable in group settings. Which is it? We need more studies to answer this question adequately. Until then, we need to use caution in generalizing from one study to the next, always asking if the study we are drawing our conclusions from is applicable in other settings like the therapeutic setting or a social environment.

Additional problems emerge in the experimental setting as to the timing of the study. Most studies have been conducted in an initial interviewing session when the experimenter meets the subject as a total stranger, or at best as an acquaintance. Therapeutic theory strongly alludes to the fact that disclosing is more appropriate
over long periods of time, and common sense tells us that self-disclosure within an established relationship is more appropriate. Yet a review of the literature shows a lack of on-going interviews. Chaikin and Derlega (1974c) found that familiarity of target persons affects the appropriateness of how much a subject discloses. Ask yourself whether you would reveal more to an experimenter or therapist. More investigations are warranted at all levels of a relationship from the inception through long range relationships to yield conclusive outcomes. Longitudinal studies may be one way to view the nature of self-disclosure in an on-going fashion. If we move away from experimental studies, we will expand our findings to other than university populations too. Field studies cultivating interest in the aged, youth, families and the therapeutic session will widen our understanding of the process of self-disclosure.

Goldstein and Reinecker (1974) identified two variables that have been overlooked in the findings that may need to be woven in the second generation of research, social class, and educational levels.

There are problems with both self-reports and objective metrics, depending on the experimenter's perspective. Which is it to be? Although each perspective has advantages, it has it's disadvantages. One or the other isn't strong enough to determine what the process of self-disclo-
sure is really like.

Results cannot be generalized from one perspective to another, therefore, limiting our universality. Each criteria is taken from different perspectives, a different operational definition. Perhaps they are in reality measuring different variables.

After reviewing all the above considerations of intervening variables and methodology that have limited previous research, we can take a second breath and start again towards a clearer understanding of self-disclosure. Multi-dimensional designs, correlations of measurement criteria, and field studies offer new hope in reaching a richer picture of the process of self-disclosure.

Now that we are aware of many of the problems with the research, we can work towards better designs and more meaningful research because self-disclosure is so important an issue. Self-disclosure pervades all our interactions, and continued exploration may prove to reflect upon all areas of our life—family, career, romantic love, as well as self-understanding.
References


Colwill, M. L. & Perlman, D. Effects of sex and relationship on self-disclosure. JSAS Catalog of Selected Documents in Psychology, 1977, 7, 40. (Ms. 1470.)


Joel, B. Honesty. Los Angeles: Columbia Records, 1971. (Song)


Jourard, S. M. Religious denomination and self-disclosure. Psychological Reports, 1961, 8, 446.


Mehlman, B. Love as the measure of man. Mental Hygiene, 1961, 45, 84-88.


Wiebe, B., & Williams, J. D. Self-disclosure to parents by high school seniors. Psychological Reports, 1972, 31, 690.


