"Knowing Me, Knowing You" Self-Disclosure: Gender Gap Analysis

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"Knowing Me, Knowing You"

Self-Disclosure: Gender Gap Analysis

By

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Part I

Chapter One: Review of Literature 1

## Part II

Chapter Two: Gender Differences in Self-Disclosure

A. Early Sex Roles 6  
B. Parenting Influences 7  
C. Language Influence 8  
D. Television Influence 10  
E. Genetic Influence 12  
F. Implications of Gender Differences 12

Chapter Three: Self-Disclosure Clarified 15

Chapter Four: Factors Influencing Self-Disclosure

A. Dyads 20  
   1. Risk Factors 20  
   2. Reciprocity 21  
B. Valance 22  
C. Gender 23  
D. Empathy 26

## Part III

Chapter Five: Self-Disclosure - Rewards and Risks

A. Rewards 28  
B. Risks 31

Summary 34  
Appendix 35  
References 36
ABSTRACT

Self-disclosure, the unique sharing of information about oneself which would not otherwise be known, is examined in the following discussion. While knowledge of same-sex and mixed-sex disclosures are valuable, this research is restricted to the examination of mixed-sex disclosure. The Johari Window is used as a tool to facilitate the understanding of self-awareness as it relates to disclosure. Gender differences are examined to illuminate how mixed-sex orientations alter the self-disclosure process. The research tests the assumption that in mixed-sex disclosures men disclose less and seek control, whereas women disclose more and attempt to uncover feelings. The impact of gender on disclosure is measured by early sex-role orientation, parental teaching, language, socialization, and genetics. Finally, the results are then filtered through the factors of self-disclosure revealing the rewards and risks of mixed-sex self-disclosure.
he stripped the dark circles of mystery off revealed his eyes and thus he waited exposed/
and I did sing the song around until I found the chorus that speaks of windows/looking out means looking in my friend and I'm all right now I'm fine I have seen the beauty that is mine/you can watch the sky for signals but look into the eyes for signs.

(Ric Masten; Adler and Towne, 1987 p. 296)

Ric Masten's poem effectively summarizes a major component of interpersonal relationships; that we learn about ourselves by reflecting on our relationships with others. In order to have relationships we must first gain trust by disclosing various aspects of ourselves. Jourard (1971 a) says disclosure is permitting oneself to be known (p. 5). The disclosee then shares what they see in us. Specifically, our human condition requires interaction between persons, which in turn contributes to our self-awareness. The communication model, the Johari Window, was developed by Joseph Luft and Hary Ingham (1970) to explain how we gain self-awareness and its role. The two aspects, self-awareness and self-disclosure are linked because one must be aware of who the participants are before a sharing of unique qualities can begin. Further, robbing ourselves of interaction may cause us to stagnate in
learning personal qualities, as well as growth.

Undoubtedly, self-disclosure is a crucial element of interpersonal communication, which takes on the forms of same-sex or mixed-sex disclosures. The following discussion will be confined to cross-gender self-disclosure. Many studies have been conducted on the communication types associated with men and women. Unquestionable differences have been discovered in the way boys and girls are raised, (Berger, 1987); (Rubin, 1974) socialized, (Abbott, 1983) and taught language (Ehrenreich, 1992); (Tannen, 1991); (Stewart, Stewart, Friendly and Cooper, 1990). Television plays an important role in a developing child's life as well (Berger, 1987) and (Abbott, 1983). Still more intriguing evidence (Gorman, 1992) has revealed important biological differences between the sexes. This genetic gap may explain some of the differences in male-female disclosure styles (Stewart et al., 1990). Further, socialization (Rubin, Hill, Peplan, and Dunkel-Schetter, 1980) may be the reason men disclose less and have a more difficult time sharing feelings than women. Finally, learning may contribute to differences in language use in mixed-sex relationships. For example, women tend to use more pausing between phrases and more indirect language (Stewart et al., 1990).

In order to fully understand self-disclosure; however, a review of the Johari Window is needed in order to clarify the relationship between self-awareness and self-disclosure. This
review will also be important in understanding differences in gender communication as well. The Johari Window is a model of our four selves. The four selves include: the open self, the blind self, the hidden self and the unknown (potential) self. (For reference, see table in Appendix A).

First, the open self "...represents all the information, behaviors, attitudes, feelings, desires, motivations, and ideas that are known to the self and also known to others: (DeVito, 1989, p. 115). Such information could include age, religion and surnames. This particular area of self varies according to situational and relational contexts. Our interaction can vary vastly in scope and depth from casual acquaintances to friends and family. Communication with others depends on how much of our "personal thoughts" we choose to share. As the "open window" grows larger, communication with others becomes less inhibited. Changes in this area of sharing will affect the other disclosure "windows." For instance, the larger the open self expands, the smaller the other areas must be. The Johari Window indicates that the four aspects of the individual are not separate but necessarily connected.

The "blind window" represents characteristics which others are aware of about us, but of which we have no knowledge. "...[T]his may vary from the relatively insignificant habit of saying 'you know'...to something as significant as defense mechanisms or repressed past experiences" (DeVito, 1989 p. 116). If a person has a very
large blind spot, they are not aware of their own flaws. On the other hand, a person who has a small blind spot, knows a great deal about themselves. We might assume then that the smaller one's blind spot is, the better the level and quality of communication. While this is generally true, we must still be cautious about forcing our perceptions of others on them. Some people are not emotionally equipped to handle massive revelations about their person. Therefore, artificially attempting to increase communication by critical evaluations and pressure is not a good policy.

The hidden area of the Johari Window includes "information that you know but aren't willing to reveal to others. Items in this area become public primarily through self-disclosure..." (Adler and Towne, 1987 p. 292). People are sometimes off to one extreme or another, being either underdisclosers or overdisclosers. Each extreme can have adverse consequences to a relationship (Adler and Towne, 1987 p. 293). When one does not disclose enough, others may become fearful of rejection and refuse any attempt at interaction. On the other hand, Knapp (1984) claims overdisclosers are too indiscriminate—they share all. In fact, they share so much that information becomes trivialized. At this point, disclosure ceases to enhance the interpersonal relationship; the receiver shuts off.

Lastly, the unknown self represents truths that exist but no one knows about. We may ask, "How do we know this unknown
self exists, if no one is aware of it?" The unknown area exists by inference rather than proof. Hypnosis and dream states are two instances which tell us this hidden area is possible. Adler and Towne (1987) assert, "[i]t is not unusual to discover, for example, that you have an unrecognized talent, strength, or weakness" (p. 292). These unrecognized skills and characteristics may also be called one's potential.

A general understanding of the Johari Window will help guide us throughout the discussion of disclosure. Luft and Ingham's concept will be especially valuable during the discussion of gender differences in Chapter Two.
CHAPTER TWO: Gender Differences in Self-Disclosure

Cross-gender self-disclosure can only be understood once it is clear how men and women develop. Young children take on sex roles as they see them. Because children are so impressionable, several factors influence the way they develop. Boys and girls are influenced by parenting styles, language use, and television contact. Boys and girls also have genetic differences which reach far beyond hormonal development. Such differences in childhood may indicate why men and women's disclosure patterns differ later in life, as well as clarifying exactly what the "gender-gap" is comprised of.

Early Sex Roles:

The infant stage of development is crucial in establishing adult identity. During the early years of life many basic beliefs of appropriate masculine and feminine behavior are instilled. Abbott (1983) explains,

Learning sex-role norms and behavior is a complex process. The infant, toddler, and young child are socialized into, or taught appropriate sex-role beliefs and action in many ways. Such vehicles as language...toys, game, television, or books, convey...messages about appropriate masculine and feminine behavior. (p. 89)

The combined force of these influences as well as parents and
school are powerful. Young children accept these beliefs readily because they have no previous information to use in interpreting what he or she hears and sees.

Parents:

Parents are a constant source of knowledge for young infants. Parental actions are also influential to young children because kids often model what they see. Synchrony, the coordinated interaction of parents and children (Berger, 1988) assures a special link to a "significant other". Often parents have different expectations for young girls and boys. Rubin (1974) describes one form of stereotypical expectations of parents, who had not yet held their children, but viewed them through the nursery glass. "Boy babies were described as firmer, large-featured, more alert, and stronger. Girls were described as delicate, fine-featured, softer, and smaller" (p. 512).

Further, parents continue sex-differentiation with their children as they become toddlers. (Abbott, 1983) reports, in certain studies, both parents emphasized achievement for boys and urged them to control their emotions. Both parents characterized their relationship to their daughters as having more warmth and physical closeness. (p. 91)

Parents are also more likely to encourage dependent behavior in girls by protecting them, as well as rewarding independent behavior in boys (Block, 1976). Such variation in the
treatment of youngsters may affect how they communicate later in life to the opposite sex. For instance, sex-stereotyping, although unconscious, could lead to the strong, silent man who rarely discloses his feelings to others.

Language:

Language begins to develop at birth. Babies begin their communication through gestures and babbling. Berger (1987) contends, "Infants say a few words by the end of the first year, and they understand more words than they speak" (p. 143). For this reason, the language infants hear can affect them profoundly.

As infants reach school age, their vocabulary further reinforces stereotypes. Myra and David Dadker, American University professors of education, have found

...that girls do better when teachers are sensitized to gender bias and refrain from sexist language, such as the use of 'man' to mean all of us. (cited in Ehrenreich, 1992 p. 51)

Dr. Tannen of Georgetown University has discovered that these reinforced stereotypes carry into adulthood and may be the source of miscommunication. Tannen (as cited in Cohen, 1991) argues "...that each sex does not just have its preferred topics---boys talk about things while girls talk about feelings ---but its own conversational style" (p. 36). Men tend to talk about external things and focus on the facts. Thus, such conversational style is passed down to boys. Conversational
style or 'communicator style' involves the way one contributes information to the communication process. Norton (1980) says communicator style is, "[T]he way one verbally and paraverbally interacts to signal how literal meaning should be taken, interpreted, filtered, or understood" (p. 99). Stewart et al. (1990) extends that "[s]uch characteristics as dominant, animated, relaxed, attentive, open and friendly are often used to describe a person's communicator style" (p. 124).

As a result of communicator style, Tannen (Cohen, 1991) claims, "[t]he boys are more definite and suppress doubts. They use conversations to establish status" (p. 36). On the other hand, women talk more about feelings and people. They [women] tend to talk about their physical and psychological states and say that they are cold, tired, hungry or feeling good or bad. They talk more softly and use more expression than men do. Their talk is more polite and indirect. They use qualifiers to keep from imposing their beliefs on others. (Abbott, 1983 p. 116)

Thus, communicator style reinforces stereotypes which are typically associated with males and females. Stewart et al. (1990) extends, females are perceived to be facilitators of communication; both attentiveness (letting other people know they are being heard) and openness...
facilitate the interpersonal communication process. Men are generally perceived to be controllers of communication. Being dominant (taking charge of the interaction), dramatic (manipulating verbal and nonverbal cues)...and relaxed...conveys control...often associated with status and power. (p. 125)

Clearly, the way each gender utilizes language will affect the amount and style of self-disclosure. Tannen (1991) explains, "...from the earliest ages through adulthood, boys and girls create different worlds, which men and women go on living in" (p. 279). As men and women try to talk to each other, they may find themselves at a gap where the other person speaks a different "genderlect" (Tannen, 1991 p. 279).

Television:

Not only do children learn stereotypical male-female roles from what they hear, but they are encouraged to use the appropriate male or female language by what they see. Television does a great deal to enforce gender stereotypes. Even the program Sesame Street shows cartoon characters of little boys playing with trains as they learn to count the cars, and little girls playing "tea party" with their dolls. Such images have a profound impact. According to the 1984 Nielsen survey of preschoolers' television viewing, "children between the ages of 2 and 5 watched an average of 27 hours and 9 minutes of television each week" (Berger, 1987 p. 230). Further, Abbott (1983) claims,
Children spend more time watching television than they do reading books, listening to the radio, or going to the movies...They see approximately 250 commercials during a week's television watching where the set is turned on about six hours and eighteen minutes a day. The average child has spent fifteen thousand hours in front of a set by the time he or she is sixteen. That is four thousand more hours than the child has spent in the classroom. (p. 123)

With so much time spent in front of the television, it is no wonder that the images on television have so much impact. For instance, children see images of young blond males, passive females, and minority children as supporting characters (Berger, 1987). A 1973-74 study ranking the positive and negative effect of words and images from television found that, About 75 percent of the male roles in prime time represent tough, cool, American males who are unmarried and without responsibility. These men engage in violent, mobile occupations...Women, in contrast, are usually shown as the person being rescued or as someone playing a peripheral role... (p. 123)

Again, television socializes the idea that men are rough and tough and women are passive and secondary.
Genetics:

While parenting, language and television's socialization are important in the understanding of gender differences, new evidence reveals important genetic differences in males and females. Researchers have recently found neurological variations in brain structure and functioning between sexes.

One place to look for gender differences is in the hypothalamus. The hypothalamus is located just over the brain stem. Gorman (1992) claims, "when provoked, [the hypothalamus] consumes a person with rage, thirst, hunger or desire" (p. 45). Fluctuations in this organ's hormone release affect behavior of youngsters.

Another place to find gender differences is in the corpus callosum. The corpus callosum allows the right and left hemisphere of the brain to communicate over a series of nerve channels. Scientists have found the corpus callosum is larger in women than in men (Gorman, 1992). If the size of the corpus callosum relates to function, "the greater crosstalk between the hemispheres might explain enigmatic phenomena like female intuition, which is supposed to accord women greater ability to read emotional clues" (Gorman, 1992 p. 46).

Implications of Gender Differences:

Gender may have a significant impact on disclosure. Both men and women have different views on communication not only because of genetic predisposition, but because of parental expectations, language style differences, and television
socialization. As a result, many sex-role stereotypes are firmly entrenched. Such attitudes can raise barriers to self-disclosure. For example, Rubin et al. (1980) found that,

...traditional couples, those adhering to the stereotyped role of male 'bread winner' and female 'homemaker,' disclosed less than couples espousing more equalitarian sex-role attitudes. The traditional male, forced to limit his disclosure because of societal sanctions against any display of affect or weakness, directly affects his wife's disclosure. (cited in Rosenfeld and Welsh 1985, p. 254)

Sex-role stereotypes may change the nature of the interpersonal communication process. Stewart et al. (1990) reports,

...when talking to female friends, men tend to confide more about their weaknesses while they enhance their strengths...Women tend to confide about their weaknesses and conceal their strengths. (p. 122)

Consequently, women tend to disclose more about their concerns and fears than men do. Women, as a general rule, are more willing to share weaknesses than men. Thus, women tend to disclose at higher levels in the dating situation (Rubin et al., 1980).

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, men and women are socialized into sex-roles which are entrenched
through parenting and the environment. For example, Abbott (1983) explained that parents strongly encourage boys to have control over their emotions, while encouraging girls to be warm and caring. As a result, women (Morton, 1978) generally disclose more in depth and emotion-laden information than men. Men and women who break away from clearly established sex-roles in the disclosure process are generally viewed as acting inappropriate. Stewart et al. (1990) explains,

In fact, men who are high self-disclosers are often perceived as less competent communicators, but women who are high self-disclosers are characterized with positive traits (for women) such as affiliation and supportiveness. (p. 119)

In the next chapter, self-disclosure will be more fully explained. Sex roles profoundly shape the way each person in a mixed-sex relationship approaches intimacy enhancement through self-disclosure.
CHAPTER THREE: Self-disclosure Clarified

Understanding of the four aspects of "self," as shown in Chapter One, clarifies why self-disclosure is important to personal growth and the development of healthy relationships. For instance, the smaller our hidden self, the stronger our ties to others become (Luft, 1970). Indeed, these interpersonal ties make sharing more likely to occur. Stewart et al. (1990) explains that men and women generally disclose in order to increase intimacy (p. 118).

To more fully comprehend self-disclosure one can refer to Gilbert (1976). She stated, "[s]elf-disclosure, for too long, has been used to designate nearly anything that anyone says about oneself to anybody..." (p. 198). However, important distinctions must be drawn between self-disclosure and mere self-description. For example, Culbert (1967) claims,

Self-disclosure refers to an individual's explicitly communicating to one or more persons information that he believes these others would be unlikely to acquire unless he himself discloses it...Self-description designates self-data that an individual is likely to feel comfortable in revealing to most others. (p. 2)

Another tenant of self-disclosure is that a second person must be involved. The communication cannot be intrapersonal,
nor can it be written in a diary or journal and be called self-disclosure.

Another important element in the disclosure process is whether or not the disclosure is genuine. Researchers Miller and Steinberg (1975) agree that genuine disclosure involves some degree of risk. This type of disclosure comes as a growth enhancer for a relationship and not merely as a message for general or exploitive motives (p. 324). Gilbert (1976) contends disclosure is "...an act which often follows an attitude of trust, affection and attraction. It is a gift" (p. 198). This gift may be given in order to establish some degree of intimacy. Sutton (1975) further comments,

Humans are relational beings and speech communication enables relating....Emotional intimacy is the potential bonding force that occurs between human beings....The communication of and experiences of intimacy is one of the primary/potential outcomes of human communication that links people with people. (p. 2-3)

It is important to remember, however, that one can still know a great amount of information about another person and dislike them! Disclosure does not guarantee a positive reward for the discloser. Intimacy is not a necessary outcome of the process, even though intimacy is often both a motive and a result.

Further, self-disclosure may be comprised of varying
breadth and depth. (See Appendix B) Self-disclosure which has the motive of achieving intimacy with another person will be characterized by its depth. A person who reveals a large amount of personal detail about their past, for instance, may be seeking an intimate relationship. Knapp (1984) describes, on the other hand, that disclosure

...can focus on information, perceptions, or feelings; messages may be positive or negative, frequent or infrequent, long or short, accurate or inaccurate reflections of ourself, very intentional or under less conscious control. (p. 208)

These reflections may or may not come at opportune times and be more or less open. While intimacy can be enhanced by a broad sharing of perceptions and feelings, the opposite may just as easily occur. The potential for overload upon the receiver is a greater risk.

MacDaniels, Yarbrough, Kuzzmaul and Griffen were the first researchers to place self-disclosure on a continuum of open/personal versus closed/impersonal. These researchers have found that most open statements are "...owned, specific, and unambiguous" (cited in Knapp, 1984). They feel that open and personalized growth attaining statements should be:

1. Mutually relevant; based on the immediate situation---the here and now---not something which is past or unrelated to the present situation.
2. Personally owned - "I feel" rather than the more general "People feel".

3. Source specific - "I feel X toward you, Merle" rather than "I feel X around people".

4. Based on a causal connection to your feeling or perception—using "because" rather than not stating a reason or alluding to the cause implicitly by saying "there may be a reason".

5. Behavior specific - "You were late for our appointment" rather than "You aren't very responsible" (p. 209).

While disclosure of feelings is perceived as more open, such as those listed previously, it is important to remember that openness is not always the best policy. Indeed, an appropriate time and an appropriate place exists for such openness. Poorly timed disclosure is often perceived as socially unacceptable behavior. The discloser, thus, is seen as strange or peculiar (Knapp, 1984).

Aside from the appropriate time, disclosure will be affected by gender, especially communication which reflects sex-role stereotypes. Recall that women are more facilitatory communicators, whereas men tend to communicate for control. In a personal interview with Cohen (1991), Tannen claims,

Men are comfortable with public speech. She calls this report-talk and contrasts it neatly with rapport-talk. Rapport-talk happens in
private when two people either are or are trying
to get close....In private, women are not
necessarily dominated....For them, talk is a way
of finding out how close and intimate they are.
For men talk is a way of establishing who is in
control and has the power. (p. 37)

A woman's pressure for disclosure may push a man away more
quickly than it would draw him in. For instance, a man might
view a disclosure situation as serving no practical purpose and
shut off communication. Such withdrawal does not mean that the
man is cold and insensitive, he simply has an alternate male-
based view of the communication situation.
CHAPTER FOUR: Factors Influencing self-Disclosure

Several factors influence the act of self-disclosure. The first, and perhaps most commonly addressed factor is the Dyad, because self-disclosure is often a reciprocal process between two people. When two people meet they generally begin to "dig" until they discover general truths about each other. So, "[i]f it is generally true that intimate self-disclosure begets intimate self-disclosure, while impersonality begets impersonality, then certain implications follow for a number of areas of interpersonal endeavor" (Jourard, 1971 a p. 17). On the other hand, if disclosure is one way, we may be in for some problems as the relationship develops. There are several reasons most disclosure occurs in dyads.

First, when we disclose information about ourselves to another person, we take a considerable risk. Both persons are "...probing...in an attempt by both to understand themselves better through each other" (Stacks, Hickson and Hill, 1991 p. 274). As a result, we are suddenly more vulnerable. In a dyad, it is easy to monitor nonverbals and evaluate what the receiver is thinking at the time and alter the message accordingly. In a group setting, however, careful monitoring of non-verbals is not possible simply because more people are present. Groups increase the risk factor so much that underdisclosure may be a better option than disclosure. Secondly, according to Adler and Towne (1987), "...limiting
disclosure to one person at a time minimizes the chance that your revelations will lead to unhappy consequences" (pp. 294-295). Finally, self-disclosure usually occurs in dyads because we come to expect reciprocity. Once we share something of ourselves with another, we expect they will do the same, thus intensifying our relationship. Schaffer and Tomarelli (1989) explain,

Perhaps the most consistent findings in laboratory studies of the acquaintance process is the so-called 'dyadic' or 'disclosure reciprocity' effect: The best predictor of the level of self-disclosure that person X will use in revealing himself or herself to person Y is the level of disclosure that person Y exhibited when relating to X. (p. 765)

In fact, Knapp (1984) contends this feeling of reciprocity is so strong "...we often perceive reciprocal disclosures when they aren't there" (p. 213). Although immediate reciprocity is not necessary, it is expected over the initial stages of a relationship. On the other hand, individuals who have previously established a close relationship need not follow a social 'norm of reciprocation' when disclosing among themselves in any particular situation, for their relationship already rests on a foundation of trust and should not be seriously impaired by one
member's occasional failure to reciprocate the level of disclosure exhibited by the other. (Shaffer, 1989 p. 765)

Another factor which influences self-disclosure is valance. Valance, as described by DeVito (1989), is the positive or negative quality of the disclosure (p. 123). Previous research indicates for disclosure to be viewed as positive it must be perceived to have some kind of reward. However, more recent studies have found that disclosure must also be viewed as appropriate behavior. The relationship between disclosure and appropriateness was studied by Chaikin and Derlega (1974). The study discovered that "[i]ntimate disclosure to a stranger or an acquaintance was seen by observers as less appropriate and more maladjusted than non-disclosure" (p. 588).

Valance includes the way persons choose to present themselves. For example, many studies indicate that in the initial acquaintance stage one should present themselves in a positive way. Not surprisingly, "liking" has been directly linked to positive first impression. Studies by Blau (1964) claim that revealing negative aspects about oneself does not meet the social conditions within which liking might occur. Blau further explains:

A display of his deficiencies does not make one attractive....Hence, unless the weakness to which a person calls attention are less
significant than the attractive qualities he
has exhibited, he will not have succeeded in
demonstrating to others that he is approachable
as a peer as well as attractive but only in
convincing them that he is fundamentally not
an attractive associate at all. (p. 49)

Thus, valance would seem to have a correlation with perceived
reward. Consequently, positive or negative disclosure might be
an indicator of perceived reward and future interaction.
Further, Gilbert and Horenstein (1975) conducted a study
concerning the degree to which disclosure was personal versus
the relative valance (positiveness or negativeness) of self-
disclosure. The study concluded that

...the valance of the content was of far
greater significance...than the degree of
personalness of disclosure...subjects clearly
expressed greater attraction [likability] for
the confederate when he offered positive
disclosing statements rather than negative
disclosing statements. (Gilbert, 1976 p. 205)

Another factor which influences self-disclosure is
gender. Women tend to disclose more than men, according to
most research. The reasons for this pattern may lie within the
framework of popular society, in which image is crucial.
Interestingly enough, both men and women may fear a poor image,
thus limiting self-disclosure. However, analysis of gender
differences in disclosure reveal that men fear a loss of control. Rosenfeld summarizes male reasons for withholding, "If I disclose to you, I might project an image I do not want to project, which could make me look bad and cause me to lose control over you. This might go so far as to affect relationships I have with people other than you" (cited in DeVito, 1989 p. 124). Women, on the other hand, fear disclosure because they do not want to appear emotionally dependent. Women are fearful of personal hurt (Brehm, 1992), which can cause them to avoid opening themselves up through the disclosure process (p. 211). The reasons for both genders to withhold information then, can be attributed to stereo-typical social roles, as reviewed in Chapter Two. Through parental guidance and socialization, men are perceived as strong, independent and often insensitive, whereas women are often perceived as weaker, dependent and sensitive.

Low male disclosure levels also affect interpersonal sharing (self-disclosure). Men perhaps disclose less because it is perceived as a feminine characteristic. Men are socialized to take on leadership roles. Jourard (1971 b) clarifies,

Men, trained by their upbringing to assume the instrumental role, tend more to relate to other people on an I-It basis than women. They are more adept than women at relating impersonally to others, seeing them as the embodiment of their
roles rather than as persons enacting roles. (p. 36)

Thus, men tend to see themselves as leaders who must maintain autonomy in order to make wise choices. If men were to become too intimate, then, their knowledge of another person's feelings, might taint the decision-making process (Jourard, 1971b).

Emotional needs of men and women vary and consequently, so do disclosure styles. Not all women are open and receptive and certainly not all men are closed and unresponsive. Evidence reveals, however, that the roles learned as children may entrench certain concepts of what it is to be a man or woman. Among them are the sayings "Big boys don't cry," and "Little girls don't climb trees." Subsequently, each sex has a different way of expressing emotional needs. Naifeh and Smith (1984) propose,

> Where many men try to guard their feelings or deny them, many women share them eagerly; where many men tend to hold themselves at a safe distance from the emotions of others, many women tend to give emotional support as readily as they accept it. To feel truly fulfilled, a person must both give and receive, and many men are equipped to do neither. (p. 8)

Unquestionably, because men and women operate from different emotional levels on the whole, low disclosure by men
can be confusing to women. For instance, a woman often makes intimate connections through conversation. Naifeh (1984) explains for a woman the connection "...can happen with or without warning: talking quietly in bed or shouting over the dinnertime din..." (p. 6). Perhaps the metaphor of a thirty-five year old divorced woman describes male/female disclosure most poignantly. She said, "Men and women are often as different emotionally as the rock and the wave" (Naifeh and Smith, 1984 p. 8).

Certainly it is not difficult to see how socialization of young boys and girls manifests into a communication gap among adults. While the expanse of the gap varies in mixed-sex interactions, general steps can be taken to fill it.

Empathy is one strategy recommended to bridge the gender gap. Gilligan argued that fundamental gender differences in childhood lead to both disclosure differences and ethical differences in adulthood (Gilligan, 1982). Her research suggests that the gap is best bridged by both sexes taking an empathetic step toward one another (Gilligan and Murphy, 1979). Further, the Premarital Relationship Improvement by Maximizing Empathy and Self-Disclosure (PRIMES) is currently operating in the hope of preventing communication problems and teaching empathetic skills (Ginsberg and Vogelson, 1977). PRIMES focuses on four major areas including:

1. Training in the expressive mode of communication....Express feelings; be clear that they
are your feelings ("I feel..." rather than "You make me feel..." ); make positive statements as much as possible; be specific about your feelings and about any changes you ask your partner to make.

2. Training in empathic responding: Put yourself in your partner's shoes; try to feel the way he or she does; reflect back to your partner how you think he or she feels,...

3. Training in how and when to switch from the expressive mode to the responding mode.

4. Training in how to facilitate good communication on the part of other people.

(Brehm, 1992)

Through the PRIMES program women are given the communication tools to capitalize on the man's task-oriented behavior and solicit specific questions in order to understand feelings. Thus, the gender gap is bridged rather than widened by misunderstanding. Secondly, men can learn to communicate their feelings more often to female partners. Finally, each gender can work to empathize with the other by understanding sex-typed socialization from childhood. Such adjustments are well worth the rewards of sharing personhood with one another, as shall be discussed in Chapter Five.
Rewards:

While self-disclosure has the potential to expand any interpersonal relationship, it also has the potential for other rewards. The most obvious reward from the act of self-disclosure is an increased knowledge of oneself. A person only knows who he/she is to the extent that others give reflections back. To an individual, he/she may think they appear one way, but be perceived by others quite differently. Jourard (1971 b) summarized this thought. "Things are seldom what they seem, /skim milk masquerades as cream./ Externals don't portray insides,/ Jekylls may be masking Hydes" (p. 4). As poor as this poetry seems, it metaphorically describes the difference between perceived appearance and reality. In fact, Derlega and Grzelak (1979) suggest five purposes for self-disclosure:

(1) self-expression, or the cathartic release of pent-up feelings; (2) increased self-clarification, where anticipated self-presentation causes the speaker to attend to his or her own consistency and integration of ideas; (3) obtaining social validation through social comparison processes; (4) acting as a vehicle for relationship development; (5) social control via impression management. (cited in Duck and Gilmour, 1981 p. 17) Disclosure can help a person learn about themselves through the
response of others. But more importantly, used appropriately, self-disclosure may also facilitate the growth of a relationship, as evidenced in the last three points of Derlega and Grzelak. Duck et al. (1981) contends,

Thus, there is reward value in the information that the discloser gives, especially to the extent that it is articulated with precision and clarity. The information that the recipient receives is also potentially rewarding, leading the receiver to infer that the other likes or trusts him/her... (p. 17)

Indeed, child upbringing calls for truth. Only self-disclosure will allow a sharing of true identity, because so few persons are good at guessing details about others. Jourard (1971b) even connects disclosure with mental health. He claims:

...when man does not acknowledge to himself who, what, and how he is, he is out of touch with reality, and he will sicken. No one can help him without access to the facts. And it seems to be another fact that no man can come to know himself except as an outcome of disclosing himself to another person. (p. 6)

Self-disclosure may be correlated with physiological health. Recent studies indicate that those who self-disclose are less likely to become ill because the body is protected
from stresses which may fester if kept inside. Jourard (1971 b) asserts that low self-disclosure may be a result of our lifestyle.

As they conceal their truth from others, they succeed in concealing it from themselves [through denial]. The toll of physical breakdown from stress and dispiritation, and the frequently so-called nervous breakdown is to me evidence that such an 'all American' way is unlivable, or is not worth the price. Indeed, the strictly role-defined way of being-with-others is related to our economic and productive base. (p. 183)

Evidence has also shown that people who do not practice self-disclosure have less effective immune systems (DeVito, 1989). Therefore, doctors of the future may say, 'self-disclose for one hour and call me in the morning!'

Finally, self-disclosure has the potential to increase our effectiveness as communicators. For example, learning different aspects of an individual can help ascribe meaning to words and actions. Uniquely, self-disclosure is the only way to know such things. DeVito (1989) contends,

You might study a person's behavior or even live with a person for years, but if that person never self-discloses, you are far from understanding that individual as a complete person. (p. 126)
Risks:

Just as self-disclosure has the potential to enhance interpersonal relationships, disclosure also has the ability to weaken them. Even in relationships that have developed over a long period of time, some censorship is necessary. For example, many relationships function under the 'complete honesty' rule. While this rule is wonderful in theory, it can be quite damaging in practice. Revealing certain fantasies, lies, criminal actions or sexual preference may not always be positive. Indeed, such information may have a negative valance (Gilbert and Horenstein, 1975). Perhaps this type of information is better kept in the hidden area of self.

On a similar note, we must be cautious about disclosure because of its permanent nature. Once something has been shared, it cannot be taken back. No matter what qualifications are placed on a statement, the inferences drawn by the listener are immediate (DeVito, 1989). Recall the definition of self-disclosure provided by Culbert (1967) in Chapter Three. "Self-disclosure refers to an individual's explicitly communicating to one or more persons information that he believes these others would be unlikely to acquire unless he himself discloses it..." (p. 2). With that in mind, consider the case of Edmund Muskie. He defended his wife, in the face of the press, against slanderous accusations. "...there were tears in his eyes. Those tears, most political analysts believe, cost Muskie the Democratic nomination for president in
1972" (Naifeh and Smith 1984, p. 29). Muskie's determined stance in his wife's defense while showing emotional reaction was not considered appropriate by the public. Society's stereotypical male image simply does not allow men such openness of emotion.

The theory persists that perceived disclosure is often more important than actual disclosure (Cushman and Cahn, 1985). Both parties may not be risking the same amount when disclosing. As a result, the potential for manipulation is high. For instance, one may choose to disclose information to shock, embarrass or hurt another person (Knapp, 1984). Recall that in most disclosure situations reciprocity is expected. Therefore, one might use information, considered part of their open self, to elicit hidden responses from the other party. Knapp (1984) explains this type of disclosure abuse often occurs when a party attempts instant intimacy. Knapp (1984) clarifies:

One version involves an effort to quickly make a new male-female relationship to what seems to be the intensifying stage. This can be done by one or both participants displaying the illusion that they have some special vibes that allow them to advance more quickly than most people...This strategy of talking to a person you don't know very well as if you did....is not limited to romantic relationships. (pp. 212-213)
A final risk in the process of self-disclosure is vulnerability. Once personal information is shared with someone, it grants them a certain degree of power. We must trust that the other person will not render harm by laughing about one of the exposed scars, or sharing that information with someone else as though it were trivia. Cleaver (1968), as cited in Gilbert (1976), emphasizes this point very vividly:

...How awful, how deadly, how catastrophically they can hurt each other, [those who have disclosed] wreck and ruin each other forever! How often, indeed, they end by inflicting pain and torment upon each other. Better to maintain shallow, superficial affairs; that way the scars are not too deep....Getting to know someone, entering that new world, is an ultimate, irretrievable leap into the unknown. (p. 200)
SUMMARY:

Self-disclosure provides a fascinating glimpse into human expression and interpersonal relationships. Even a general understanding of disclosure can afford us a more expansive look into our "windows of self". This research has discussed the gender gap, a working definition of disclosure, factors contributing to disclosure, as well as the rewards and risks of mixed-sex disclosures. The examination of gender differences provides a needed perception of where and why interpersonal communication can go awry. All evidence considered, appropriate self-disclosure is a good practice as long as our minds are clear and our motives are pure. Undoubtedly, people must also remember that the purest measure of themselves comes from sharing this hidden self with another and having them pass our reflection back. "Looking out means looking in, my friend..."

(Ric Masten; Adler and Towne, 1987)
Appendix A: Johari Window

[As adapted in Human Communication Theory Lecture.]

Appendix B: Breadth and Depth of Self-Disclosure of Three
Adapted from: Irwin Allman and W.M. Haythorn (1965)


