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Self-Disclosure Paper
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The Self-Disclosure of Self-Awareness of Self-Disclosure

It has been said that the eyes are a window to the soul, but textbooks on human interactions would more likely acknowledge the eyes to be a window to only *half* of the soul. The full "picture window" is represented by an anology called the Johari window, with four regions representing the (publicly and privately) known and unknown self. Information is constantly moving from the "unknown" regions to the "known"; nearly all communication involves some migration of information in the Johari window of the speaker or the listener. Of all the ways that this can happen, self-disclosure is one of the few events under direct personal control. Each individual's rules for self-disclosure are different; sometimes, the decision is not at all an easy one. Fears and confidences collide in the speaker's brain, each with differing priorities, encouraging different answers to the question, "Should I tell...?" Interestingly, due to the nature of some of my personal motivations for self-disclosure, this paper has itself become a medium of self-disclosure – about the self-awareness my research has yielded – about self-disclosure.

Existing papers on the motivations for self-disclosure seemed a good place to start; learning why others open themselves to scrutiny has brought me a better understanding of my own rules of self-disclosure. After examining the motivations of others and looking for these motivations in myself, I find that there are three primary reasons that I will self-disclose. These reasons form a spectrum, from benign to selfish, but in all cases an in

Often I will allow a self-disclosure as a comforting response to another person's similar

disclosure: "Telling secrets has been shown to have a positive effect on the person who's doing the confessing, because keeping them requires a lot of mental work." (Flora, 2007) Offering a secret of my own reduces the other person's perceived risk of sharing; the benefit of shared secrets is a stronger relationship, with a better sense of trust – an important ingredient of true friendship (Karbo, 2007). There are many other, similar reasons I have for self-disclosure, but all fall under the blanket of the word "benign"; strengthening a relationship for its own sake, or the sake of being "a good friend", not merely for personal or emotional gain.

In the neutral ground, I very frequently use self-disclosure as a means to self-awareness and understanding. Reading another person's reaction to my self-disclosure can help me gauge what my own opinion of it should be; I will usually choose a target for this disclosure that offers a minimal risk, should my disclosure gather an unexpected response. Other times, I will use disclosure to actively seek understanding – expressing my personal situation to a listener will help them to understand the thoughts in my head, and more importantly (to me) the reasons behind them. I often joke that I have an obsession with precision in speech; I frequently allow self-disclosure as an attempt to engender understanding when my language skills fail to find a sufficiently accurate and/or precise expression of my thoughts.

There is also a darker side to self-disclosure, however. Selfishly, I will deliberately disclose something to promote the sympathy of a listener I must persuade, or as a necessary concession in order to achieve a larger goal. Often, I use self-disclosure to gain control of a conversation: I have found that a low-risk self-disclosure in a situation that would usually be considered inappropriate can unbalance the listener's grasp of the conversation, allowing me to steer the conversation during their confusion. This technique seems best suited to conversations with superiors. In short, there are times that I selfishly and

deliberately use self-disclosure as a means of manipulation. This is not a flattering revelation, but it was this behavior that led me to see a pattern that I describe below, a pattern that I started looking for when I read a brief summary of Omarzu's *Disclosure Decision Model*. I found it impossible to track down the original paper, cited as (Omarzu, 2000), therefore my understanding of his model comes only from a brief description (Maij-de Meij, 2007). Maij-de Meij performed a study of workplace self-disclosure, but I found his description of Omarzu's model to apply generally to my self-decision process at all times.

My research has led me to a new level of self-awareness, one that I am not yet comfortable with. What I find unsettling is a consistent pattern of consciously using self-disclosure as a means to reach a goal. I am at once very open, very prone to self-disclosure, yet very guarded, very careful that the information released should further a purpose, even if that purpose is not a selfish one. I am surprised that this pattern of behavior has escaped my notice for so long, and at the time of writing, I am not sure if it is a habit I will personally embrace or work to change. Therefore, this essay – a self-disclosure in its own right – falls into the same pattern it describes: a means to a goal, to gain feedback about this discovery from a trusted source, and help determine the effect this new information will have on my self and my rules of self-disclosure. And also for the necessary grade.

Reference List

DeVito (2005) – Citation information readily available to audience, and yet not to author. (!)

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