Self-Disclosure: Theories and Model Review

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Abstract

Self-disclosure is the act of revealing details about ourselves to others. The topics of disclosure range from superficial details to very private, sensitive and personal information. Self-disclosure develops human relationships. The study examined three theories and a model that focus on self-disclosure and development of human relationship. The theories are: Communication Privacy Management (CPM), Social Penetration Theory (SPT), Social Exchange Theory (SET) and the Johari Window Pane model. The study can conclude that all the three theories and the model converge on many aspects of explaining the development of human relationship. The most important factor in the development of human relationship is disclosure. Through self-disclosure, boundaries are permeated, costs and rewards are considered, information freely flows though the four panes (quadrants) and intimacy is developed as disclosers '*peel off*' the superficial layers to the core personality. There is a possibility that a conceptual framework can be created by using variables in the three theories and the Johari Window pane model to explain the development of human relationship.

1.0. Introduction

The paper examines three theories and one model that address the concept of self- disclosure in explaining the development of human relationships. The paper primarily focuses on the interconnectedness that the three theories and model put across when explaining the concept of self-disclosure and. The theories and model are: Communication Privacy Management theory (CPM), Social Penetration Theory (SPT), Social Exchange Theory (SET) and the Johari Window pane.

2.0 Self-Disclosure; the concept

This is the act of revealing personal information about ourselves that others are unlikely to   discover in other ways. This information touches on topics that one would not even think about discussing with particular people and therefore, we keep our thoughts and feelings to ourselves (Derlega, Winstead, & Greene, 2001; Steinberg, 2007; Tang et al., 2013; Wood, 2010).

However it is also argued that any verbal or nonverbal communication that reveals something about the self is self disclosure. Therefore, self-disclosure doesn't always have to be deep to be useful or meaningful. Superficial self-disclosure, often in the form of "small talk," is key in initiating relationships that then move onto more personal levels of self-disclosure. Self-disclosure gives room for controversial topics such as contraceptive use to be discussed and agreed upon (Masaviru, Mwangi and Masindano, 2015).

Self-disclosure has both advantages and disadvantages. With relation to its merit, it allows us to open up and disclose more with people who disclose too (Steinberg, 2007). Secondly, it is a reciprocal process where the more one discloses to others, the more they will be willing to do the same (Steinberg, 2007). Thirdly, disclosure leads to trust that develops the relationship. However, talking too much about ourselves early in a relationship may not facilitate the development of friendship because too much disclosure might be viewed as being insecure. As a result, self-disclosure can lead to rejection because of not being liked or accepted (Steinberg, 2007). Nevertheless, self-disclosure is subject to various issues and factors.

A number of factors influence when to disclose and when not to disclose. The first factor is cultural differences between the partners, especially strangers. Culture has rules and sanctions that inhibit high levels of self-disclosure between strangers (Derlega et al., 2001; Tang et al., 2013). Secondly, individual traits or differences in interpersonal skills influence how and when to disclose. Those who have secure attachment to people, have high levels of self-disclosure while high openers encourage others to self-disclose. Thirdly, gender differences affect self-disclosure because men feel awkward to disclose than women therefore, women are more likely to reciprocate the level of intimacy than men (Derlega et al., 2001; Tang et al., 2013).

2.1 Self-Disclosure and Couple's Relationship

It is noted that people disclose more to people they like and to people who have disclosed to them too. In marital relationships, couples who disclose a lot are likely to receive high disclosure as compared to those who disclose little and partners in a closed relationship might not reciprocate self-disclosure in a single episode (Miller & Collins, 1994; Tang et al., 2013). Self-disclosure has an important role to play in the development of intimacy between couples (Masaviru et al., 2015). With intimacy, couples share a lot of information and are likely to make joint decisions on various topics including types of contraceptives to use (Greene et al.,2006; Tang et al.,

2013).

3.0 Theories and Model

The theories are: Communication Privacy Management theory (CPM), Social Penetration Theory (SPT), Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Johari Window Pane model.

3.1 Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Social exchange theory was introduced in 1958 by the sociologist George Homans. He defined social exchange as the exchange of activity, tangible or intangible, and more or less rewarding or costly, between at least two persons which bring in the aspect of communication (Emerson, 1976). SET is a social psychological and sociological perspective that explains social change and stability as a process of negotiated exchanges between people. Social exchange theory posits that human relationships are formed by the use of a subjective cost-benefit analysis and the comparison of alternatives. The major difference between social and economic exchange is the nature of the exchange between parties. Neoclassic economic theory views the actor as dealing not with another actor but with a market and environmental parameters, such as market price. Unlike economic exchange, the elements of social exchange are quite varied and cannot be reduced to a single quantitative exchange rate. Social exchanges involve a connection with another person; involve trust and not legal obligations; social exchanges are more flexible; and rarely involve explicit bargaining (Emerson, 1976).

Simple social exchange models assume that rewards and costs drive relationship decisions. Both parties in a social exchange take responsibility for one another and depend on each other. The elements of relational life include rewards and costs. Costs are the elements of relational life that have negative value to a person, such as the effort put into a relationship and the negatives of a partner(Emerson, 1976). Rewards are the elements of a relationship that have positive value. As with everything dealing with the social exchange theory, it has as its outcome satisfaction and dependence of relationships. The social-exchange perspective argues that people calculate the overall worth of a particular relationship by subtracting its costs from the rewards it provides.

The worth of a relationship influences its outcome, or whether people will continue with a relationship or terminate it. Positive relationships are expected to endure, whereas negative relationships will probably terminate. In a mutually beneficial exchange, each party supplies the wants of the other party at lower cost to self than the value of the resources the other party provides. In such a model, mutual relationship satisfaction ensures relationship stability. Therefore, self-disclosure is considered as a social exchange in the context of ongoing relationships (Emerson, 1976).

This set of theoretical ideas represents the core of Homans' version of social exchange theory. The first proposition: the Success Proposition states that behavior that creates positive outcomes is likely to be repeated. The second proposition: the Stimulus Proposition believes that if an individual's behavior is rewarded in the past, the individual will continue the previous behavior. The third proposition: the Value proposition believes that if the result of a behavioral action is considered valuable to the individual, it is more likely for that behavior to occur. The fourth proposition: the Deprivation-satiation proposition believes that if an individual has received the same reward several times, the value of that reward will diminish. The fifth proposition discusses when emotions occur due to different reward situations. Those who receive more than they expect or do not receive anticipated punishment will be happy and will behave approvingly (Emerson, 1976).

3.2 Communication Privacy Management Theory (CPM)

Petronio sees *communication privacy management theory* (CPM) as a map of the way people navigate privacy. She wants us to think of *privacy boundaries* that encompass information we have but others don't know. Privacy boundaries can range from thin and porous filters to thick, impenetrable barriers that shield deep, dark secrets. But whenever we share a portion of that information with someone, we are reshaping a privacy boundary (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). Having a mental image of protective boundaries is central to understanding the five core principles of Petronio's CPM: firstly, People believe they own and have a right to control their private information secondly, people control their private information through the use of personal privacy rules and thirdly, when others are told or given access to a person's private information, they become co-owners of that information. The fourth principle states that co-owners of private information need to negotiate mutually agreeable privacy rules about telling others and lastly **w**hen co-owners of private information don't effectively negotiate and follow mutually held privacy rules; boundary turbulence is the likely result (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008).

Although the above five statements seem deceptively simple, the management processes they describe are often quite complex. People believe that they own their private information, and they actively work to maintain control of what, when, and with whom it is shared. The first principle of CPM says that is true for all of us because our sense of ownership motivates us to create boundaries that will control the spread of what we know. The second principle of CPM addresses how thick those boundaries might be because of privacy rules.

However, the privacy rules help people feel they have control over their private information. CPM posits that five factors determine own privacy rules formation. These are *culture, gender, motivation, context,* and *risk/benefit ratios.*

Petronia explains the third principle by saying that the act of disclosing private information creates a confidant and draws that person into a *collective privacy boundary*, whether willingly or reluctantly which is referred to as co-ownership. First, the discloser must realize that the personal privacy boundary encompassing the information has morphed into a collective boundary that seldom shrinks back to being solely personal. The CPM theory addresses the tension between openness and privacy between the "public sphere" and the "private sphere" in relationships. As a result, individuals involved in relationships are constantly managing the boundaries between the private and the public, between those feelings they are willing to share and those that they are not. Privacy boundaries can range from thin and porous filters to thick, impenetrable barriers that shield deep, dark secrets (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008).

3.3 Social Penetration Theory (SPT)

The social penetration theory was developed by Irwin Altman and Dallas Taylor in 1973. They metaphorically described people as onions that have wedges or areas of personality each of which has multiple layers of progressive depth. Couples move from superficial layers, middle layers, and inner layers to core personality. Irwin Altman and Dallas Taylor first looked at relationship as an uninterrupted linear development of relationship to greater openness and intimacy as well as desires for independence and closedness. In 1987, they acknowledged the weakness of the theory and amended their ideas to accommodate the tension that exists between independence and closedness (Wood, 2004). The theory is based on the assumptions that relationship development is systematic and predictable. As intimacy develops, relational partners not only assess the rewards and costs of the relationship at a given moment but also use the information they have gathered to predict the rewards and costs in the future.

West and Turner (2010) developed the issues of breadth as well as depth and refer to breadth as the number of various topics discussed in a relationship while depth refers to the time that relational partners spend on communicating about these various topics. As relationships move toward intimacy, a couple can expect a wider range of topics to be discussed (more breadth), with several of those topics marked by depth. Consequently, breadth and depth moves a relationship toward more closeness, but if people disclose too much during the early stages of a relationship, they may actually end the relationship.

There are four stages of relational development (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). The first stage is *orientation* that involves people engaging in small and simple talk. It depends on social desirability and norms of appropriateness. The second stage is the *exploratory affective exchange* whereby, people in a relationship begin to reveal and express personal attitudes about moderate topics. This is the stage of casual friendship and people are not willing to reveal the whole truth. The third stage is the *affective exchange* where people start talking about private and personal matters. Criticism, kissing and arguments might arise at this stage. The fourth stage is known as the *stable exchange* characterized by sharing highly personal thoughts, beliefs and values. Persons in the relationship can predict the emotional reactions of each other
(Littlejohn & Foss, 2008).

3.4 Johari Window Pane

Figure 1: Johari Window Pane

Open pane	Blind pane
Hidden pane	Unknown pane

Source: Steinberg (2007)

The Johari window pane model of self-disclosure has four panes. The first is open pane which is the public area that allows us to disclose willingly. Information such as name, job, club and other superficial details about us are revealed here. In addition, most people will know some of your interests and family information. The knowledge that the window represents, can include not only factual information, but feelings, motives, behaviours, wants, needs and desires etc indeed, any information describing who you are. When you first meet a new person, the size of the opening of this first quadrant is not very large, since there has been little time to exchange information (Chapman, 2003; Steinberg, 2007; Stellar Leadership, n.d).

Hidden pane has information that one prefers not to disclose to someone else. These include salary, marital problems, failures, successes and fears. Again, there are vast amounts of information, virtually your whole life's story that has yet to be revealed to others. As you get to know and trust others, you will then feel more comfortable disclosing more intimate details about yourself (Chapman, 2003).

Blind pane has all the things that others know about you but you are not aware. Unknown pane contains mysteries that are known to no one. It is the unexplored area (Steinberg, 2007). These areas of information however determine the merits and demerits of self-disclosure. The process of enlarging the open quadrant is

called self-disclosure, a give and take process between people and those they interact with. Typically, as you share something about yourself (moving information from the hidden quadrant into the open) and if the other party is interested in getting to know you, they will reciprocate, by similarly disclosing information in their hidden quadrant.

Self-disclosure reduces the hidden area feedback reduces the blind area Together they reduce the unknown area (Chapman, 2003).

4.0 Discussion

A relationship develops based on cost and rewards assessment (Derlega et al., 2001; Greene et al., 2006). At this point, Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Social Penetration Theory (SPT) converge because when the worth of a relationship is calculated, the relationship develops from superficial layer to intimacy (Derlega et al., 2001; West & Turner, 2010). SET looks at a relationship as developmental based on the aspects of rewards and costs while SPT looks at relationship as being developmental as it moves from superficial to intimacy level. . In relation to the SPT, intimacy develops a relationship since it is a positive outcome that is likely to be repeated. Both SPT and SET assume that the disclosers are responsible for the development of a relationship. Hence, it can be concluded that the development of linear relationship depends solely on the benefits of the relationship to each discloser rather than the costs (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008; West &Turner, 2010).

As noted above, the cost-benefit analysis is important in a relationship. This aspect of SET converges with the aspect of privacy boundaries in Communication Privacy Management (CPM). Through the notion of cost-benefit analysis, disclosers manage private and public sphere by unconsciously or consciously examining the benefits of disclosing certain information.

At the beginning of a relationship, there is greater disclosure which gradually increases when couples move from superficial to intimate levels (Derlega et al., 2001). As the relationship develops, there is a gradual widening of information being shared, but self-disclosure gradually slows down as it moves to more private and intimate topics. Although self-disclosure is assumed to be linear, there are some topics that are perceived to be too personal and off limits therefore, they are closed (Derlega et al., 2001; Tang et al., 2013). The above statements are aspects of Johari Window Pane, CPM and SPT. This is because as a relationship develops, there is the constant tension between what should remain in the 'private sphere' and what should come into the 'public sphere.' These aspects of CPM can also be explained using the four quadrants of Johari Window Pane. Through self-disclosure, more information is shared and is able to move from the unknown pane, blind pane and hidden pane into the open pane. Therefore, CPM and SPT as well as Johari Window Pane converge on the aspect of how information flows between the disclosers. The two theories and model assume that information management and flow between the disclosers is important in the development of human relationship.

According to Derlega et al. (2001) disclosers have to balance between being open or closed with each other. Openness-closedness is an important issue when managing relationships because it brings out the notion of privacy boundaries. As a result, disclosers are expected to avoid talking about certain topics or keep secrets from each other in order to maintain privacy or protect the relationship from dying (Greene et al., 2006). As stated in SPT, CPM and SET, trust is very important in a relationship. Being open, closed or impenetrable/privacy boundaries under CPM can be penetrated when there is trust between the disclosers. Under Johari Window Pane, trust is also very important when information is in the hidden quadrant or pane. When disclosers trust each other, then the information in the hidden quadrant permeates into the open quadrant by being disclosed.

According to the SET, CPM, SPT and Johari Window Pane, disclosers feel that they own their private information. As explained by the CPM, this information needs to permeate thin and porous filters or thick impenetrable barriers that yield deep secrets is also supported by Johari Window Pane. Under Johari Window Pane, disclosers control the amount and type of information that moves between and among the quadrants. This sense of ownership to private information is also an aspect of SET. This is because, the private information needs to be negotiated and exchanged between the disclosers. The private information becomes the wants to be supplied in a relationship for it to move to stability stage.

The aspect of boundaries is explained in all the theories and the model. SPT uses the analogy of the onion to explain how disclosers have to slowly peel off the superficial layers, middle layers, and inner layers to the core layers. These are boundaries that determine disclosers' personality in the process of disclosing information. CPM talks about how to manage the boundaries such that if the boundary rules are not well negotiated then there is a possibility of boundary turbulence (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). Johari Window Pane has boundaries among the open pane, the hidden pane, the unknown pane and the blind pane. These boundaries determine the type and flow of information in the quadrant. SET explains the boundaries by looking at costs and rewards. There is a boundary between the cost of a relationship and the reward. Therefore, disclosers are able to exchange information and permeate relationship boundaries when the rewards are predictable. However, when the cost of a relationship is higher, the boundary becomes impenetrable and disclosers are not willing to

exchange information.

The four stages of relational development in SPT can be compared to the quadrants in Johari Window Pane. The *orientation* stage where people are involved in small and simple talk is similar to the *open pane* that is the public pane that allows disclosers to share information willingly. Both *orientation* stage and the *Open pane* involve superficial details about the disclosers. The second stage, the *exploratory affective* and the third stage, *affective exchange* can be compared to the *Hidden pane*. In the second and third stage disclosers start revealing personal attitudes as they move to private and personal matters. The *Hidden pane* contains private and personal information that disclosers are unwilling to reveal. The fourth stage, *stable exchange* is reached when disclosers share highly personal thoughts, values/beliefs and they can predict emotional reactions of each other. The *stable exchange* stage is achieved when the information in the *Blind* the *Unknown* panes is revealed through disclosing and reciprocity.

5.0 Conclusion

The study can conclude that all the three theories and the model converge on many aspects of explaining the development of human relationship. The most important factor in the development of human relationship is disclosure. Through self-disclosure, boundaries are permeated, costs and rewards are considered, information freely flows though the four panes (quadrants) and intimacy is developed as disclosers '*peel off*' the superficial layers to the core personality.

There is a possibility that a conceptual framework can be created by using variables in the three theories and the Johari Window pane model to explain the development of human relationship.

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