

information that you know but aren't willing to reveal to others. Items in this hidden area become public primarily through self-disclosure, which is the focus of this section. Part 4 of the Johari Window represents information that is *unknown* to both you and to others. At first the unknown area seems impossible to verify. After all, if neither you nor others know what it contains, how can you be sure it exists at all? We can deduce its existence because we are constantly discovering new things about ourselves. For example, it is not unusual to discover that you have an unrecognized talent, strength, or weakness. Items move from the unknown area into the open area when you share your insight, or into the hidden area, where it becomes a secret.

The relative size of each area in our personal Johari Windows changes from time to time according to our moods, the subject we are discussing, and our relationship with the other person. Despite these changes, a single Johari Window could represent most people's overall style of disclosure.

### BENEFITS AND RISKS OF SELF-DISCLOSURE

By now it should be clear that neither all-out disclosure nor complete privacy is desirable. On one hand, relationships suffer when people keep important information from one another (Caughlin & Golish, 2002; Mashek & Sherman, 2004). On the other hand, revealing deeply personal information can threaten the stability—or even the survival—of a relationship. Communication researchers use the term **privacy management** to describe the choices people make to reveal or conceal information about themselves (Petronio, 2007). In the following pages we will outline both the benefits and risks of opening yourself to others.

**Benefits of Self-Disclosure** Modern culture, at least in the United States, places high value on self-disclosure (Marshall, 2008). The following are some reasons people disclose personal information:

*Catharsis* Sometimes you might disclose information in an effort to “get it off your chest.” Catharsis can indeed relieve the burden of pent-up emotions (Pennebaker, 1997), whether face-to-face or online (Vilhauer, 2009), but when it's the *only* goal of disclosure, the results of opening up may not be good. Later in this chapter you'll read guidelines for disclosing that increase the odds that you can achieve catharsis in a way that helps, instead of harming relationships.

*Self-Clarification* It is often possible to clarify your beliefs, opinions, thoughts, attitudes, and feelings by talking about them with another person. This sort of gaining insight by “talking the problem out” occurs in many psychotherapies, but it also goes on in other relationships, ranging from good friends to interaction with bartenders or hairdressers.

*Self-Validation* If you disclose information with the hope of seeking the listener's agreement (“I think I did the right thing”), you are seeking validation of your behavior—confirmation of a belief you hold about yourself.