

On a deeper level, this sort of self-validating disclosure seeks confirmation of important parts of your self-concept. For instance, self-validation is an important part of the “coming out” process through which gay people recognize their sexual orientation and choose to disclose this knowledge in their personal, family, and social lives (Han, 2001; Savin-Williams, 2001).

*Reciprocity* A well-documented conclusion from research is that one person’s act of self-disclosure increases the odds that the other person will reveal personal information (Dindia, 2000b, 2002; Forgas, 2011). There is no guarantee that revealing personal information will trigger self-disclosures by others, but your own honesty can create a climate that makes the other person feel safer, and perhaps even obligated to match your level of candor (“I’ve been bored with our relationship lately” might get a response of “Wow, me too!”). Reciprocity applies online as well as in person: The number of mediated friendships a person has may be predicted by the amount of perceived reciprocity (Detenber et al., 2008). Reciprocity doesn’t always occur on a turn-by-turn basis: Telling a friend today about your job-related problems might help her feel comfortable opening up to you later about her family history, when the time is right for this sort of disclosure.

*Impression Formation* Sometimes we reveal personal information to make ourselves more attractive, and research shows that this strategy seems to work. One study revealed that both men’s and women’s attractiveness was associated with the amount of self-disclosure in conversations (Stiles et al., 1996). Consider a couple on their first date. It’s not hard to imagine how one or both partners might share personal information to appear more sincere, interesting, sensitive, or curious about the other person. The same principle applies in other situations. A salesperson might say, “I’ll be honest with you” primarily to show that she is on your side.

*Relationship Maintenance and Enhancement* Research demonstrates that we like people who disclose personal information to us. In fact, the relationship between self-disclosure and liking works in several directions: We like people who disclose personal information to us; we reveal more about ourselves to people we like; and we tend to like others more after we have disclosed to them (Dindia, 2000b).

Appropriate self-disclosure is positively related to marital satisfaction (Hess et al., 2007; Rosenfeld & Bowen, 1991). Disclosing spouses give their relationships higher evaluations and have more positive expectations than do partners who disclose less (MacNeil & Byers, 2009). And a number of studies have demonstrated that increased self-disclosure can improve troubled marriages (Laurenceau et al., 2005; Waring, 1981). With the guidance of a skilled counselor or therapist, partners can learn constructive ways to open up.

*Moral Obligation* Sometimes we disclose personal information out of a sense of moral obligation. People who are HIV-positive, for example, are often faced with the choice of whether they should tell their health care providers and their partner. One study (Agne et al., 2000) found that patients typically did disclose their HIV status to their health care provider