

because they felt it was the responsible thing to do for themselves (to help fight their illness) and to protect the provider. Another study (Derlega et al., 2000) found that people who are HIV-positive often see disclosing their status “as a duty” and as a way to educate the partner—as an obligation. Despite this prevailing belief, two decades of research has shown that 40 percent of persons testing positive for HIV did not reveal this result to their sexual partners (Allen et al., 2008).

Social Influence People sometimes reveal personal information to help others. This behavior is common in self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous (Hegelson & Gottlieb, 2000). On a larger scale, one study revealed that guests who chose to self-disclose on a particular television talk show indicated that their primary motive was “evangelical”: They felt a calling to address injustices and remedy stereotypes (Priest & Dominick, 1994).

Self-Defense Sometimes you may choose to self-disclose something before someone else discloses it for you. A review of the social influence literature by Williams and Dolnik (2001) suggests that self-disclosing negative or damaging information is frequently used as an adaptive social influence strategy called “stealing thunder.”

Risks of Self-Disclosure While the benefits of disclosing are certainly important, opening up can also involve risks that make the decision to disclose a difficult and sometimes painful one (Afifi & Caughlin, 2007; Facebook: Nosko et al., 2010). The risks of self-disclosure fall into several categories (Greene et al., 2006; Rosenfeld, 2000).

Rejection In answering the question that forms the title of his book, *Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?*, John Powell (1969) summed up the risks of disclosing: “I am afraid to tell you who I am because if I tell you who I am, you may not like who I am, and that’s all I have.” The fear of disapproval is powerful. Sometimes it is exaggerated and illogical, but there are real dangers in revealing personal information:

A: I’m starting to think of you as more than a friend. To tell the truth, I think I love you.

B: I think we should stop seeing one another.

Negative Impression Even if disclosure doesn’t lead to total rejection, it can create a negative impression.

A: You know, I’ve never had a relationship with a woman that lasted more than a month.

B: Really? I wonder what that says about you.

Decrease in Relational Satisfaction Besides affecting others’ opinions of you, disclosure can lead to a decrease in the satisfaction that comes from