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Introduction

I, am a very private person, as well as a student. As students we are faced with the ever

present threat of teachers who call on us even when our heads are down taking notes and our

hands are not raised. As a student and a very private person I have come to detest these

occurrences. However while doing some research I came across an article written by Dr. Travis

L. Russ professor of Communications and Media Management at Fordham University in New

York about communication apprehension and learning styles. In this article Dr. Russ says that

there is a coloration between people with high communication apprehension and learning better

from reflective work and thinking, while people with a lower amount of communication

apprehension prefer to do direct experiments (Russ, 2012). When I share things that I am

thinking there is usually a long pause in between the questions asked and my answer, which is

caused by me making sure that what I say is not especially revealing towards my inner thoughts.

When I was in Advanced Public Speaking the hardest presentation for me to give was the speech

of introduction. I hate doing those even if I am just sitting down at a desk posting a recording of

it I still get extremely anxious over what I have said, "what if I offend someone?" "did that

sound too harsh?" "I hope they don't think I'm weird." These things are a constant when I am

preparing to talk about myself. I believe that by looking at Social Penetration Theory we can

better understand how independence as youths impact the levels of privacy that students and adults in general show as time progresses.

Case

When I was younger my parents traveled for work almost constantly so I would usually stay with my grandmother who lived just next door to us, we were extremely close to one (1) another. That was great, until my seventh (7ᵗʰ) birthday when she died. In a case published in 2011 by two (2) Albany University Sociology professors, shows that people who are only children "have less frequent social activities with relatives" and these effects are greater with people who are raised by a single parent (Trent & Spitze, 2011) since my parents traveled all of the time it was like my grandmother was my parent. Her death had a rather nasty impact on me because she was the person who pretty much raised me this caused me to become more distant from other people because I was, still am, afraid that if I get close to someone that if something happens then I will be left alone again and that scares me. Another thing has pushed me to be more independent of others is that all through my primary and secondary schooling I was bullied. When I was younger I would easily trust others with information that at the time seem inconsequential but would later be used as a weapon to attack me either physically or mentally/emotionally. Most of the time when asked a question I give a generic answer when possible and when it is not I have a tendency of giving monosyllabic answers to the distress of my peers, instructors, and friends and family. By pulling back I am displaying habits of someone with communication apprehension. Communication apprehension (CA) is a concept that has been extensively researched by James McCroskey says CA can be defined as "the fear or anxiety associated with either real or perceived communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey & Beatty, 1986)However, in Advanced Public Speaking with the speech of self-

introduction I was unusually open with the people in there that I had just be acquainted with. I believe that this class acted as a sort of catalyst towards a deeper self-disclosure of my thoughts.

Theory

Social Penetration Theory (SPT) was developed by Dalmas Taylor and Irwin Altman to help people like you and me to help people develop "deeper intimacy with another person through mutual self-disclosure and other forms of vulnerability" (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2015, p. 97). One of the key things about this theory is depth of penetration, which is how much we show and how much we say about some things (Taylor & Altman, 1987). For example like in the movie *Shrek* as well as in our book the metaphor used is the onion, everybody has different layers. Like when I am taking notes in my mandarin class and the instructor calls on me when she knows I do not know how to say it but I can write it for her, on the outside I will give her my best attempt at it but if we "peel" back some layers it can be seen that I am throwing a fit on the inside. Another key concept is mentioned right in the definition of Social Penetration and that is self-disclosure, i.e. your level of transparence (Taylor & Altman, 1987). If I had said what I wanted to then Zhao lao shi might have asked me to leave the class room but since I kept my thoughts to myself I was saved from leaving the room.

Analysis

When taking a class in person it is easier to slide by with the bare minimum of information during the ice breakers because there is no set time limit. However, over the summer I took a Critical Thinking course online and we had to post a one (1) to two (2) minuet video about ourselves, now in class I can usually squeak by in about thirty (30) seconds that is not too bad. So it took me a couple of days to prepare what I was planning to say to the class, so

I wouldn't sound like an idiot but I did it, I self-disclosed some things that most of the time my classmates, even if we were to meet outside of class, would not know, like that I am a book junkie. By looking at SPT's concept of self-disclosure, I can now see that by not sharing a bit of myself with others I am hurting myself as well as not giving the other party any face.

If I had known about these different communication concepts in my past I would have been better prepared for how to handle the different things that I came across. For instance if I had self-disclosed more information about myself then I would have had a stronger connection with my friends, and possibly formed some new friendships. By forming more connections with others my interpersonal linkage power would have increased considerably because if we look at "friendship paradox" it says "that the mean number of friends of friends is always greater than the mean number of friends of individuals" (Feld, 1991). All that gobbledygook means is that on average our friends have more friends than we do and their friends have more friends than them, so if you have strong connection with someone then they might introduce to their friends and then you can form a connection with that person growing your linkage power. I believe that with enough linkage power a lot of things can be accomplished like having a nice backing to help prevent things from getting messy or needlessly tedious. Looking back at the SPT concepts, depth of penetration in particular, it can be see that the more that someone is allowed into your inner self, you inner layers, then the stronger the connection will be (in most cases). Having a stronger connection with people can also help preserve your face, like if someone were to start a rumor your friends will be able to say that this is not like "xyz" and that he or she would not do something like that.

Application

While looking at SPT it becomes apparent to me that by allowing for more self-disclosure in my relationships with not only the people closest to me but also to people that I am meeting for the first time will allow for stronger bonds to be formed between us.   I am an only child, while I was growing up I was responsible for myself and no one else, and when I was younger, I made the mistake of telling some people some things that should not have been said. After thinking back I can clearly see where my mistake in telling these individuals what I did, I was bullied for a long time until I got tired of it and it resulted in me almost being removed from my school indefinitely and missing my graduation. These events caused me to be more closed off to people, unwilling to share even the slightest detail about myself that could get me in that situation again. However, after reviewing the concepts in SPT I now feel like I have a better hold on what I should and should not disclose to others, because if you do not share at least a little bit then your relationships with others will be strained and hard to maintain and to form.

Throughout my telling of this story I have been applying what I have learned from SPT. I did not have to disclose anything the get my point across in some form, I could have just as easily looked at SPT from a more academic standpoint. However, I find that when analyzing something and trying to relay your thoughts to others it is easier to do so through stories and applying to your audience's pathos. By appealing to someone's emotions you can form a stronger connection with them, allowing to get deeper since of what makes you, you, and possible see similarities between each other. This deeper insight into each other can cause a stronger friendship to be created, and to me, this deeper insight is what Social Penetration Theory is all about.

Conclusion

Today, I am still working towards being a more open person. I will never be that guy on the airplane that tells you their life story, I will more than likely wind of being the guy who just listened to their story and give some general commentary to what is being said. It's not perfect and it never will be but I am moving forward in my pursuit of forming stronger connections with the people that I come into contact with. After looking at SPT I can see some areas that I still need some improvement on as well as how I could have conducted myself differently in the past, by just applying some of the concepts covered under this theory. In most cases it would have been beneficial for to grasp part of what is covered in Social Penetration Theory. At the beginning of this story I mentioned questions that I frequently ask myself. After some thought I find that, asking these questions is just a normal part of how humans interact with others, regardless of the setting. Humans, in general, will find themselves at some point or another anxious about what they say it is just part of who we are. Looking at SPT it becomes apparent, to me anyways, that we can still be nervous about what we say it is natural but we should use these moments to be more transparent with others and just say what we believe needs to be said.

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