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Understanding Unconventional Methods of Self-Disclosure in

New Relationships

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Author Note

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Abstract

Previous literature on the subject of self-disclosure in new relationships has failed to go into depth about the reasons why negatively-valenced self-disclosure can draw people closer together. In this study, the impact of personality type on the relational success of unconventional methods of self-disclosure is explored. The participants of the study were eight male, caucasian college-aged students who were each individually interviewed. The results of the study show that personality type can play a large role in the relational success of such unconventional disclosure techniques, as well as the relational trajectory. Extraverts were more likely to positively react to unconventional methods of self-disclosure, as well as to escalate and maintain relational closeness in personal experiences with such self-disclosure. In addition, while people who self-identify as both introverted and extraverted will be less likely to self-disclose themselves, they will still generally feel more comfortable with an individual who engages in unconventional methods of self-disclosure with them first, and will tend to experience temporary relational closeness followed by de-escalation in personal experiences of relationships that began with unconventional methods of self-disclosure.

Keywords: Self-disclosure, unconventional, introversion, extraversion, relational success, comfort
Understanding Unconventional Methods of Self-Disclosure

In New Relationships

Self-disclosure has often been used throughout interpersonal relationships as a vital method to develop relationships. Self-disclosure is defined as verbal communication that reveals a particular aspect of a person to others (Guerrero, Andersen, & Afifi, 2015). Often times, this disclosure is reciprocated, and creates a connection between the two individuals (Guerrero et al., 2015). Frequent disclosure is usually associated with advancing the relationship and leads to increased liking (Guerrero et al., 2015).

Other factors have been researched, however, that have shown the negative aspects of self-disclosure. Information that’s either too negative or disclosed too early can have the opposite effect, and can lead to disliking (Guerrero et al., 2015). While self-disclosure can be extremely positive in generating closeness between individuals, the timing of self-disclosure matters (Guerrero et al., 2015). According to research, you can reveal too much too soon, we can often misfire with the depth of our disclosure depending on the context, and the person you’re disclosing to matters (Guerrero et al., 2015).

To complement this existing literature, I will differentiate between the negative, neutral, and positive outcomes of unconventional methods of self-disclosure in new relationships. Specifically, I explore the situations, contexts, and personal factors in which the supposed negative, or unconventional, aspects of self-disclosure can actually lead to an increased connection between the two parties. While unconventional methods of self-disclosure can typically result in negative feelings, there are also situations in which it will result in positive relational development.
Literature Review

Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosure is one of the most important communication ways we communicate when building connection with another individual. The most common definition of self-disclosure is any verbal communication that reveals a particular aspect of an individual to another person (Guerrero et al., 2015). However, there are also nonverbal factors of self-disclosure that must be considered, such as a particular clothing article that shows affiliation with a certain group (Guerrero et al., 2015). Self-disclosure often involves the decision of an individual whether or not to reveal information that’s considered as highly personal, such as one’s personal dreams, fears or insecurities (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006). It is vital to be able to distinguish the situational contexts in which revealing these personal components is acceptable, as there can be many relational consequences if it’s not (Greene et al., 2006).

Self-disclosure has been linked to playing a key role in being associated with liking. Research has found that people who engage in intimate disclosures are more liked than people who disclose at lower levels (Collins & Miller, 1994). In addition, people disclose more to those whom they initially like, and subsequently disclose less to those who they initially dislike (Collins & Miller, 1994). When an individual discloses information to another, it typically results in them liking that individual, rather than disclosing being the result of liking that individual (Collins & Miller, 1994).

Self-disclosure can also be broken down into either personal or relational aspects (Greene et al., 2006). Personal self-disclosure is any information about oneself,
while relational self-disclosure is any information about one’s relationship with another individual (Greene et al., 2006). Both have implications for either maintaining or developing relationships, and can work in either a positive or negative manner, depending on the context (Greene et al., 2006). Mutuality of disclosure is also a big factor in positive progression of relational development (Greene et al., 2006). Specifically, in romantic relationships, partners who disclose a considerable amount are generally more likely to be recipients of high levels of self-disclosure in return (Greene et al., 2006).

Self-disclosure differences between different age groups and genders have also been researched. Communication researchers Rapini, Farmer, Clark, Jill and Barnett (1990), found that older adolescent females generally exhibit greater emotional self-disclosure to both their parents and friends than their younger female counterparts and male counterparts altogether. As people get older, they tend to gradually disclose less to their parents and more to their friends and peers (Rapini et al., 1990).

**Social Penetration Theory**

There are multiple theories that aim to understand the processes of self-disclosure. Social penetration is one of these theories, and it provides a method to explain the reciprocal behaviors that often occur between two individuals when they’re in the developing stage of their relationship (Taylor, 1968). Some of the communication techniques that people utilize are exchanging information about their attitudes or beliefs, exchanging articulations of positive or negative affect, or participating in events and activities together (Taylor, 1968). When this interpersonal development is occurring, the interaction extends in two ways: through breadth of penetration, which is the total amount of communication that is occurring, and depth of
penetration, which is how personal or intimate the interactions are (Taylor, 1968). As relationships continue to develop, they have a tendency to progress through four stages of development that go from the least degree of intimacy and social penetration to the greatest: orientation, exploratory affective exchange, full affective exchange, and stable exchange (Hammer & Gudykunst, 1987). The differences between ethnicity and sex on social penetration has been explored, and the researchers found that both blacks and females generally engage in greater social penetration with their close friends than whites and males do (Hammer & Gudykunst, 1987).

**Uncertainty Reduction Theory**

Another applicable theory to help understand self-disclosure techniques in new relationships Uncertainty Reduction Theory. This theory articulates the way that people think and behave during the initial stages of relationship development (Knobloch, 2015). Uncertainty is present to the degree that interpersonal situations are unpredictable, which is typically the case during the initial stages of a new relationship (Kramer, 1999). When uncertainty levels are high, this will typically result in information seeking in order to reduce this uncertainty (Kramer, 1999). Conversely, as uncertainty levels decrease, this is typically correlated to an increase in communication (Kramer, 1999). This theory is primarily used to explore initial interactions, and the ways that people are motivated to seek information in order to reduce uncertainty in these interactions (Kramer, 1999).

**Disclosure in Initial Meetings With New People**

In developing new relationships, self-disclosure can be a valuable tool to utilize in order to make predictions and decisions about further continuing the relationship. People often use
self-disclosure, and the subsequent reactions by the person receiving the information being disclosed, in order to make decisions about the status of the relationship’s future (Derlega, Winstead, & Greene, 2008). It can be a valuable tool when first meeting someone to determine if they are trustworthy, how much you like them, and whether to identify them as a potential friend (Derlega et al., 2008). Other factors also influence self-disclosure techniques at the start of a relationship, such as culture, personality, or gender, as well as the medium through which the communication occurs, whether it be online, face-to-face, or some other communication channel (Derlega et al., 2008). Other factors have also been explored that play a large role in relationship development in the beginning stages. Proximity, physical attractiveness, similarity and equity also all play a role in initial feelings of attraction towards a stranger (Berg & Clark, 1986).

Initial relationships and self-disclosure techniques are highly important in predicting the trajectory of the relationship in the future, which is what will be explored in this article.

**Personality Type: Introversion/Extraversion**

A key factor that can play a role in an individual’s self-disclosure tendencies is their personality. One way to define the differences between individuals’ personality is to divide them into groups, known as introversion and extraversion. Generally speaking, introverts have their attention turned in on themselves, and are concerned most with their own thoughts and feelings (Popenoe, 1937). Conversely, extraverts have their attention turned outwards, and are more concerned with everything that is going on around them (Popenoe, 1937).

These two groups of people tend to exhibit different behavior as a result of these innate traits. Introverts tend to be more organized and neat, sensitive, conscientious, are affected heavily by both praise and blame, and fail to assert themselves because of inner inhibitions
(Popenoe, 1937). Opposingly, extraverts tend to be aggressive, enjoy sports and outdoor life, typically reach out and make social contacts, and quickly articulate any thoughts that come to mind (Popenoe, 1937).

Lastly, there are varying personal preferences that accompany both introverts and extraverts. Introverts tend to be by themselves, day-dream often, prefer to save money, and are slow to give their confidence to a friend (Popenoe, 1937). An extravert is the exact opposite of all of these traits, as they prefer to be in a crowd, don’t plan as much for the future, like spending money, and are quick to give their confidence to a friend (Popenoe, 1937). The differences in these two personality groups will be observed in the exploration of this study.

**The Present Study**

In the present study, I will be exploring the dimensions of self-disclosure in new relationships among college-aged students ranging from ages 18-25. I utilized individual interviews in order to discover the situations and personal characteristics that may or may not have an impact on the reception of unconventional methods of self-disclosure, and the accompanying relational development.

Research Question 1: How do personality traits impact the relational success of unconventional methods of self-disclosure in new relationships?

Relationships are always emerging in communication, and there is speculation that studying people who have just met isn’t important in understanding how friendships and romantic relationships can form based on varying dynamics (Berg & Clark, 1986). This argument is often founded in the idea that relationships are more complex than what occurs in the initial interaction. Thus, it is worth considering how initial interactions shape relational
trajectories. Turning point analysis has been successfully used to understand the complexity of relationships. While other approaches suggest that relationships develop smoothly such as social penetration theory, the turning point approach suggests that relationships follow a much more rigid and unpredictable path that’s affected by both positive and negative events (Guerrero et al., 2015).

**Turning Points**

In the context of relationships, a turning point is any event, occurrence, or interaction that is associated with a change in a relationship (Guerrero et al., 2015). They include major relational events that mark a change of some sort in the relationship (Guerrero et al., 2015). Turning points can be used to emphasize the events that become isolated in people’s minds as being the most impactful on a relationship, such as the story of how they met, anniversaries, or saying I love you for the first time (Guerrero et al., 2015).

In order for communication scholars to identify the events that change people’s relationships, they often utilize a turning point analysis, which is essentially a map that is used to show the ups and downs that influence both the growth and downfall of relationships (Guerrero et al., 2015). In many cases, simply the act of communication can signify a turning point on these maps (Guerrero et al., 2015). After this initial communication, it is common that a high quality, intimate conversation will be marked as the next turning point in the relationship.

In addition to communication-based turning points, there are also several other types of turning points that can be illustrated. One of these is activities or special occasions, in which doing a specific activity with another person can change the trajectory of the relationship, such as going on vacation with a romantic partner for the first time (Guerrero et al., 2015). Another
example would be events related to passion and romance, such as the first kiss between romantic partners (Guerrero et al., 2015). Other examples of non-communication turning points include events related to commitment and exclusivity, changes in families and social networks, changes in proximity and distance, crisis and conflict, and perceptual changes (Guerrero et al., 2015). All of these examples of turning points help us to interpret how our own relationships have changed over time, for better or for worse. Thus, given distinct differences in personality types, the complexity of relational trajectories, and the role that communication plays in them, this study also examines how personality traits shape relational trajectories of relationships that begin with non-normative disclosure.

Research Question 2: Do/How do personality traits shape the relational trajectories as illustrated through turning point analysis of people whose relationships began with non-normative self-disclosure?

Methods

Paradigm

In this research study, the data was interpreted through the interpretive lens. This paradigmatic assumption was based off of several tenets of the theory. First, this research article is focused on understanding unconventional methods of self-disclosure in new relationships. A key tenet of interpretive theory is that this understanding takes place in localized knowledge (Baxter & Babbie, 2010), as the rules and meanings that I receive in the data will be specific to the social group that I’m studying, making it impossible to generalize. This is the case in the study, as I’m examining college-aged students specifically in the immediate community.
In addition, the interpretive paradigm also suggests that humans act the way they do because they constantly engage in meaning-making activity in order to do something purposive (Baxter & Babbie, 2010). Similarly, in the research study, the goal is to discover the meanings behind the way certain people respond to unconventional methods of self-disclosure in new relationships. By being able to see the world through this light, I was able to conduct the most effective research to understand what each response means to the individual.

**Participants**

In the study, I utilized a collection of 8 different male individuals who range in age from 20-24. They were all college students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and none of them were aware any of the other individuals were being interviewed, despite knowing each other outside of the research study. All were citizens of the United States who would be best described as Caucasian. The recruitment aspect of gathering these participants was based on an online post to a large group of people asking for participation. The criteria for participation involved having experiences with unconventional methods of self-disclosure in new relationships.

**Measures and Procedures**

In order to answer research question one, I utilized individual interviews with each participant in a controlled setting. The reason for individual interviews was to eliminate any outside influences that might occur if there were other people present. Using a questionnaire as the guide, I went through a series of open-ended questions in order to gather data about the topic. The interview protocol was designed based on a series of questions that I saw best fit to obtaining information relevant to the research questions. Participants were not influenced in any way by any outside factor, and simply responded to each of the questions in the way that they
saw best fit, with no feedback given to any of their answers. All data was recorded using an online voice recorder.

The step-by-step procedure involved several processes. First, I got the participants to a controlled location that wouldn’t have any outside distractions. Next, I gave a quick briefing about the benefits and consequences of the study before beginning the questionnaire. Once the interview process began, I simply turned on the voice recorder, asked the questions, and listened intently to their answers. After all of the questions had been answered, I thanked the individual for their participation, saved the recording, and gave them a quick debriefing.

The interview questions began with questions regarding the demographic. I recorded the participant’s race/ethnicity, age, current year in school and gender. Following this, I began with questions designed to get to initially know the individual. I inquired if they defined themselves as an introvert, extravert, or a mix of both, and followed that up by asking if they are generally a more open person or closed off from others. I proceeded by asking whether or not it takes them a while to “warm up” to a person when they’re first interacting. I then moved on to a question asking the participant to think of an example where they self-disclosed intimate information to someone other than their family or close friends, and asked them to elaborate if so. This was designed in order to get an initial idea about any correlations between personality type and disclosure tendencies.

I proceeded to ask questions about if they had ever had a situation where a person disclosed intimate information to them, and it made them feel uncomfortable. If they responded yes, they were asked to elaborate. Next, they were asked how they typically respond when someone discloses personal information to them. This was done as a way of observing any
differences between the way they usually respond to intimate information, and the way they respond to intimate information that makes them feel uncomfortable. Because of this, the next question that I asked was to have them describe the types of new interactions that make them feel comfortable with the person that they’re talking to, such as the setting, the surrounding people, or the communicative habits of the person.

After this, I asked the participants to think if they have ever had someone disclose personal information to them early in the relationship, and it caused them to feel more comfortable with the person. If yes, this question was followed up by having the participant describe the information, the situation, and why it made them feel more comfortable. This question was asked in order to receive information that relates directly to the research question. As such, I followed this question by asking if there are any topics that they generally avoid discussing when first interacting with someone, and if so, what those topics are. I wanted to see if there was any correlation between topics they avoid discussing, and intimate topics that they receive that may cause more comfort.

The interview questions were concluded by asking if they’ve ever had someone ask a personal question when they first met, and, whether or not the participant answered the question, the individual proceeded to answer it anyways. This question was asked as a way of evaluating one of the key ways that some individuals attempt to self-disclose with people, and gather the feelings behind people when they encounter this. I then thanked the individual for their participation, and ended the interview.

In order to answer research question two, I had the participants informally fill out a turning point graph (Appendix A) about the escalation and/or de-escalation of a relationship that
they’ve experienced that began with non-normative self-disclosure. The turning point graph that they were asked to complete involved them thinking of the relationship, what non-normative disclosure began the relationship, and any subsequent turning points that marked a change in relational closeness. For any turning point that they articulated, they were asked to describe why this was a turning point and what change in the relationship came about as a result.

**Data Analysis**

In order to analyze the data for research question one and two, I utilized the process of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in order to best extract results from the data. I began this process by transcribing the data. I listened through all of the interviews, and recorded the responses word-for-word. After this, I read through the full transcription multiple times in order to become familiar with the data and begin the process of looking for commonalities. Next, I developed initial codes of the data in order to assist in the overall process of creating themes. This proved to be helpful, as having various codes throughout the transcript helped immensely in creating relevant and coherent themes to the study. Using these initial themes, I then created a thematic map that was worked to incorporate both the themes and the initial codes into a series of sections that would be most coherent and relevant to the overall study as a whole. I then used this thematic information in order to specify and analyze each theme more in depth, and organized the thematic data accordingly in order to best interpret the results. This was a thorough process that worked to help define the overall story. This extensive process was finalized by the writing of the actual data analysis through a finalized collection of the relevant data and themes in order to create a clear articulation of the data analysis. In order to analyze the data for
research question 2, I extended this same process to my analysis of each participant response to the questions around the turning point graph.

Results

The findings for research question 1 suggest that personality type may play a role in the relational success of unconventional methods of self-disclosure in new relationships. The types of disclosures that the participants identified as being unconventional were any information that was too personal and made them feel uncomfortable, such as sexuality depression, romance, or divorced parents, as well as any information that is difficult to formulate a response to. After examining the results of the interview process, it became clear that separating the results of the participants based on their personality type would be the most beneficial. The resulting themes that emerged based on introversion/extraversion were an effective way to observe both their similarities and differences in regards to unconventional self disclosure. Four of the participants self-identified as both introverted and extraverted, three participants described themselves as strictly extraverts, and one participant described himself strictly as an introvert. The types of questions that were asked in the interview process were designed in order to distinguish factors that may or may not lead to different feelings in regards to unconventional methods of self-disclosure. As such, the themes that represent each group indicate varying implications that will be discussed in the following section. The table shown on the page 26 of this paper provides an overview of the themes that emerged for both introverts/extraverts and strictly extraverts.

Mixture of Extraversion and Introversion

After acquiring demographic information, I began each interview by asking the participant if they described themselves as an introvert, extravert, or a mixture of both. The four
participants who described themselves as the latter shared a variety of similarities and
differences. They all described themselves as generally open people, with participant 7
expanding this, “I’m not afraid to to express my opinions generally speaking, but this is based on
the situation.” Three of these participants went on to state that they don’t intimately disclose to
people who aren’t their close friends, while participant 7 reiterated this sentiment, but added
another notion that, “I’ve disclosed information about romantic relationships to people in the past
because I wanted to get a 2nd opinion about the girl. Usually, if I self-disclose to people that
aren’t my close friends, it’s about romantic stuff.” Half the participants also stated that they
generally warm up quickly to people in new relationships, while the other half said that it takes
them a while to warm up.

Another key theme that emerged among these participants was that they all had
experienced situations of receiving self-disclosure that made them feel uncomfortable, with
topics that were all very personal information, such as sexuality, depression, or disclosing to seek
comfort. However, all four participants stated that, when someone discloses personal
information to them, they try to listen and be supportive, and three of the four stated that they
also try to reciprocate and give feedback.

In addition, three of the four participants articulated that having somebody else they
know around them in the new interaction makes them feel much more comfortable, while further
stating that if the person is a friend of a friend that that also increases comfort. As such, three of
the four also stated that when someone discloses personal information to them, it almost always
makes them feel more comfortable with the person. Participant 6 rationalized this by stating, “It
almost always makes me feel more comfortable with the person. If someone is talking about
something early in the relationship, it’s probably the worst thing about them, which means that it’s only up from that point.” Participant 7 elaborated on a different reason for his feelings, stating that, “If this person is self-disclosing, it means that they’re confident enough to tell me that this bad thing happened, but we’re going to talk about it and get past it. It makes me feel comfortable because they felt comfortable telling me, they knew I wasn’t going to be offended, and if the information isn’t overly crazy I think that helps a lot.” Participant 8 added that, “It makes me feel more comfortable knowing that they’re willing to open up about serious things that not everybody knows about in their life. It makes me feel more inclusive with it.”

Lastly, in regards to topics they generally avoid discussing in new interactions, they all avoid personal issues such as family and relationships, with two of the four also avoiding politics and religion. Half of the participants don’t like it when someone asks a personal question just to answer it themselves, with the other half noticing, but not caring, when individuals do this.

Overall, people who self-identified as both introverted and extraverted were generally open people who didn’t typically disclose to people who weren’t close friends. They all had situations with uncomfortable self-disclosure by an individual, and all of these situations involved very personal information. In addition, they all tried to listen and be supportive when people disclosed personal information, and ¾ of them tried to give feedback and reciprocate. Half of them take a while to warm up to people, and they all avoid personal issues such as family and relationships in new interactions. Lastly, ¾ of them all felt more comfortable when people disclosed personal information to them, and half of them didn’t like it when people ask a question just to answer it themselves. Next, I will discuss the results from the interview process with people who identified as an introvert.
Introversion

The one individual who defined himself as strictly an introvert had several varying responses that are interesting when compared to the other participants. He defined himself as a generally closed-off person who doesn’t typically disclose to people that he doesn’t know well. It usually takes him a while to warm up to people, and experienced an uncomfortable self-disclosure situation when a person talked extensively to him about a recent breakup immediately after meeting him.

When someone self-discloses to him, he typically tries to understand what they’re thinking, and tries to talk them through it the best that he can in order to make them feel better. He feels more comfortable in new interactions if they share a mutual friend, and couldn’t think of a situation in which he felt more comfortable with a person after they self-disclosed personal information.

Lastly, he stated that he tends to avoid topics of family issues, health problems, and relationship issues in new interactions. When someone asks an intimate question just to answer it themselves, he articulated that he notices when people do this, but it doesn’t bother him.

Overall, the one individual who identified as an introvert was a generally closed off person who doesn’t disclose to people who aren’t a close friend. He was uncomfortable in a situation when there was self-disclosure about a recent breakup, although he tries to give feedback and understand what the person is going through when they self-disclose. He takes a while to warm up to people, and is more comfortable around people if they share a mutual friend. In addition, he doesn’t typically talk about anything personal when conversing with a new person. Lastly, he doesn’t mind when people ask a question just to answer it themselves.
conclude, I will discuss the results of the interview process with people who strictly defined themselves as extraverts.

**Extraversion**

All three of the participants who described themselves as strictly extraverts defined themselves as open people, with participant 5 adding the stipulation that they are open unless they’re getting vibes from the other person that say otherwise. All three also said that they warm up quickly when meeting new people, with participant 2 adding the stipulation that, “I open up quickly mainly if the person is responding well to the interaction.” Two of the three said that they generally disclose to people that they aren’t close with, while one said that he typically doesn’t do this.

In addition, all three had experienced a situation in which someone disclosed information to them that made them uncomfortable, with the reasons for such discomfort varying from not knowing how to empathize, not knowing what to say, and feeling uncomfortable talking about romantic relationships. All three also described situations that made them feel more comfortable in new situations. The reasons for such comfort were, as stated by participant 2, “If we share a common interest, or if I share a mutual friend with that person.” Participant 4 shared the same sentiment that he feels more comfortable if they share a mutual friend, and added that, “I feel more comfortable in situations if I’m meeting them with somebody that I already know. Also, if I’m in a familiar setting such as a bar, I feel more comfortable.” Participant 5 added to this same idea, stating, “I feel more comfortable if we share a mutual friend, because then I know that they have redeeming qualities that makes me want to pursue the relationship.” However, participant 5 also added that, “I would even say attractiveness. Like sometimes you just feel more
comfortable around them, it’s like the halo effect where if they’re attractive you just feel more comfortable.”

Next, all three participants stated that they feel more comfortable when someone self-discloses intimate information to them. Participant 2 rationalized this sentiment by stating, “It feels like it means that I can be open with them as well.” Participant 5 added to this by stating that, “it makes me feel closer to the person.” Participant 5 added a different reason, stating that, “If they disclose information that resonates with me personally, it helps a lot. Like this lady at my work has a gay son, and she told me this the first time I met her, and now I’m extremely close to her.”

Lastly, all three shared the exact same topics that they avoid discussing when interacting in new relationships, which were politics and religion. All three also shared the same sentiment in regards to their feelings when someone asks an intimate question just to answer it themselves. They all don’t mind when people do this, and participant 2 elaborated by articulating that it means that the person wanted to talk about it.

Overall, the participants who defined themselves as strictly extraverts were all generally open people, with ⅔ generally disclosing to people they aren’t close with. They all had uncomfortable experiences of self-disclosure in new relationships for various reasons. In addition, they all try to listen when people self-disclose, and in turn offer support. Also, they all warm up quickly in new interactions, and are all more comfortable if they share a mutual friend with a person in a new interaction. Next, they all feel more comfortable to people when they disclose personal information to them, and all three avoid politics and religion altogether when
talking with a person in a new interaction. Lastly, all three don’t mind when someone asks a question just to answer it themselves.

Now that I’ve discussed how personality traits shape the relational success of initial non-normative disclosure, I will discuss how this kind of initial non-normative disclosure shapes relational trajectories across personality types. Research question 2 asked do/how do personality traits shape the relational trajectories as illustrated through turning point analysis of people whose relationships began with non normative self-disclosure. The findings suggest that personality traits may also play a role in shaping the relational trajectory of such relationships.

**Mixture of Extraversion and Introversion**

Of the four people who self-identified as both introverted and extraverted, all four experienced de-escalation in their relationships that began with non-normative self-disclosure. Of these four relationships, \( \frac{3}{4} \) experienced de-escalation and no subsequent escalation afterwards, while \( \frac{1}{4} \) did experience an escalation in the relationship after a de-escalation.

Of the \( \frac{3}{4} \) that de-escalated and stayed that way, two of the relationships were due to the nature of the actual relationship/person. For Participant 7, the initial non-normative self-disclosure was when a person opened up about their depression to him. It made him feel an obligation to continue listening to their problems, and many of their turning point conversations in which they grew closer centered around things related to that. The relationship developed to a point until he realized they were only growing closer because he was helping the other person solve all of their problems. It made him not want to disclose as much the more that he learned about them, and it eventually reached a turning point where he decided it was all too much for
him. He put barriers between them on purpose, and de-escalated the relationship primarily through avoidance.

For Participant 1, the relationship started off with the person talking about a recent breakup to him. It continued to go well after the initial interaction, and they gradually grew closer through exchanging phone numbers, texting daily, and making plans to hang out together. However, after an elongated escalation of the relationship, a turning point was reached when Participant 1 discovered that she was already in a relationship with another person. This resulted in an immediate de-escalation, as it showed him about the type of person that she truly was. He also utilized the strategy of avoidance to de-escalate the relationship as much as possible.

Participant 6 also experienced de-escalation of the relationship, though it was due to situational reasons rather than personal. The relationship began with a coworker who immediately disclosed that drugs were the reason that she was incarcerated. However, she initially disclosed this in a positive way, and because she started off with the worst possible disclosure, Participant 6 knew it was only up from there. The relationship continued to escalate, and every time that they talked, he felt as though there was a new turning point that continued to strengthen the relationship. Their relationship experienced de-escalation only when Participant 6 stopped working with her, as now they do not see each other nearly as much. However, every time they do see each other, he makes it a point to have a significant conversation with her and catch up. Their communication made the relationship escalate, and the situation of hardly seeing each other anymore is the only reason it experienced de-escalation.

Lastly, Participant 8 experienced a relationship that had escalation after a period of de-escalation. The relationship began with the person telling Participant 8 that they had dated
the same girl at roughly the same time. This created an initial connection, but escalated as they had a mutual friend that caused them to hang out more than they would have otherwise. Through these occasions of spending time together, they grew closer together the more they got comfortable around each other, and they eventually decided to live together, which was a big turning point. This is where the de-escalation began, as they initially grew closer after moving in together, but this quickly deteriorated, as they were forced to see each other all the time. Their relationship de-escalated the entirety of their time living together. However, after they moved out, the relationship escalated again, and they now text multiple times a week just to talk, despite living in different cities. Once again, a situation, rather than a communicative event, is what caused the biggest turning points in this relationship.

Overall, of the four participants who identified as both introverted and extraverted, all 4 experienced de-escalation in their relationships that began with non-normative self-disclosure. ¾ of these relationships stayed that way, while one experienced subsequent escalation after the de-escalation. Of the ¾ that de-escalated and stayed that way, two of them were because of the actual nature of the relationship, while the other was simply due to a situation that was outside of either of their control. Moving on, I will discuss the results of the introvert’s relational trajectory

**Introversion**

Of the lone participant who identified as strictly an introvert, his relational trajectory in a relationship that began with non-normative self-disclosure experienced no de-escalation. However, they also never grew incredibly close to begin with.

Participant 3’s relationship began with someone who immediately started talking with him about a recent bad breakup that they had experienced. It began uncomfortably, although he
did end up talking about it with im for awhile. Initially, the two shared a mutual friend, which helped pave the way for the initial interaction. The next time they saw each other, the person acknowledged what had happened before and thanked him for listening, which sparked the friendship through debriefing the initial non-normative self-disclosure that had occurred. This was the biggest turning point of the relationship, as after this, the relationship essentially plateaued. They remain friends today, although they simply maintained their level of connection and intimacy, and did not develop the relationship much further.

Overall, the one participant who identified as an introvert experienced a relational trajectory that had only escalation, although this escalation was not a particularly strong one. The two never became particularly close after the initial non-normative instance of self-disclosure. To conclude, I will discuss the results of the participants who identified strictly as extraverts.

**Extraversion**

Of the three participants who identified as strictly extraverts, ⅔ are still close with that person and only experienced escalation, while the other experienced de-escalation that was due to external circumstances besides the two’s relationship.

Participant 4’s relationship that began with non-normative self-disclosure began with a coworker immediately asking if he drank and/or “partied.” When he didn’t directly answer, the coworker began to describe how he himself did. The relationship escalated at first, as they went out together, and it resulted in them forming a connection together, and Participant 4 no longer thinking that the initial interaction was unorthodox anymore. The biggest turning point in the relationship was an instance in which they got particularly intoxicated together. This resulted in
an escalation with the person, as Participant 4 feels that a person seeing him at his lowest results in a strengthened bond. The relationship then continued to escalate, and they proceeded to hang out more and more both at work and on the weekends. He is still very close with this person and the relationship has not had any de-escalation.

Participant 5 also experienced a relationship that had no de-escalation. He had a much older brother who was already moved out of the house when he was born. The relationship started poorly, as the older brother felt that they were much closer than Participant 5 thought, and he shared information as though they were already close family members. He understood that it was fine because they were brothers, but because he hardly knew him at all and he was treating him like a brother, it made him uncomfortable. However, after this initial interaction, the relationship grew very slowly the older than Participant 5 got. The relationship reached a turning point when Participant 5 graduated high school, and they sat down and had a deep conversation as adult brothers at his graduation party. This marked a point where they were the same level of comprehension and maturity where they could actually understand that they were brothers and the subsequent connection that accompanies such a relationship. The next big turning point was when they had their first family reunion, and they made it a priority to spend time with each other and see what’s going on in their lives, which is something they had never done before. Since then, they’ve experienced no de-escalation and they’re relationship is still only continuing to grow.

Lastly, Participant 2 had a relationship that began with a coworker asking him why he was feeling down one day. When he didn’t want to say why at first, she opened up about why she feels down on some days, and described an event that recently happened to her that made her
upset. As a result, Participant 2 opened up to her as well, and they immediately experienced quick escalation in their relationship. They experienced another turning point soon thereafter when he was feeling down on another day, and she was able to empathize very well. Participant 2 stated that being in a low point and making a connection with someone can really strengthen the bond, which is what he experienced at this point in their relationship. The relationship continued to escalate until they reached a point where they had almost become too close, and since Participant 2 was already in a committed relationship with another woman, it became a relationship that he felt needed to die off. The subsequent de-escalation was gradual, and was accomplished through an increasing amount of avoidance by Participant 2.

Overall, ⅔ of the extraverts remained close after the escalating the relationship following non-normative self-disclosure, while the other experienced de-escalation after the initial escalation. This de-escalation, however, was not strictly due to the relationship between the two of them. The results of the interview process between the participants of each personality type has several interesting implications, which will be discussed in the following section.

Discussion

Overall, the present study confirmed that an individual’s personality type can play a role in the relational success of unconventional methods of self-disclosure. A person who defines themselves as an extravert is more likely to positively respond when faced with unconventional methods of self-disclosure. In addition, a person who typically does not self-disclose to individuals that they just met will still feel more comfortable with a person when they self-disclose intimate information to them. Lastly, the type of information that is being disclosed
matters significantly when it is being received by a person who self identifies as both introverted and extraverted.

The present study also showed that personality type may also play a role in shaping the relational trajectories of people whose relationships began with non-normative self-disclosure. A person who defines themselves as an extravert may have more success escalating and maintaining relationships that began with such non-normative self-disclosure. In addition, people who define themselves as both introverted and extraverted may experience a temporary close relationship if it began with non-normative self-disclosure.

**Significant Findings**

Among both groups, all seven of the participants identified themselves as a generally open person. However, while all three extraverts stated that they warm up quickly to people, only two of the four participants who self-identified as both introverted and extraverted stated that they warm up quickly to people. The time it takes to feel comfortable talking to a person can have a large relation to how accepting said people are to unconventional methods of self-disclosure in new relationships, which is why it’s an important theme to consider going forward.

In addition, there was a big difference among extraverts and the participants who self-identified as both introverted and extraverted in regards to their own self-disclosure techniques in new relationships. All three of the extraverts stated that they generally tend to self-disclose to people, even if they don’t consider them a close friend, while only one of the four people who identified as both extraverted and introverted stated that they typically disclose to non-close friends, but with the stipulation that it involves the topic of romance. If an individual
is one who tends to self-disclose to people they don’t know as well, they’re subsequently likely to be more accepting when on the receiving end of the same types of disclosures from other people.

There was also a difference among extraverts and the participants who self-identified as both introverted and extraverted in regards to the trajectories of their relationships that began with non-normative self-disclosure. Of the three extraverts, two of them described that they are still close with the individual and experienced no de-escalation after the initial escalation, while the other extravert did experience de-escalation in the relationship, although it was due to circumstances outside of the control of just the two of them. Conversely, of the 4 participants who identified as both introverted and extraverted, all four experienced de-escalation in the relationship after an initial escalation period. Two of these four relationships de-escalated because of the nature of the relationship, and one de-escalated due to circumstances that were outside of their control. Only one participant was able to salvage the relationship and re-escalate the relationship after a period of de-escalation. It is also interesting to note that the one participant who identified strictly as an introvert experienced an initial escalation period with the individual, but their relationship stagnated soon thereafter and never materialized into a close connection.

However, there were similarities between the two groups in regards to experiences of uncomfortable self-disclosure. Everyone in both groups said they had experienced instances of this, although the topics varied. As such, it’s important to note that no matter the personality type, most people experience instances of uncomfortable self-disclosure, and being aware of the
topics that makes an individual uncomfortable can influence their own self-disclosure techniques to other people.

Another big similarity between the groups was their responses when they are faced with intimate self-disclosure from an individual. All participants stated that they try to listen to what the person is saying, and all participants except for one who self-identified as both introverted and extraverted also stated that they try to reciprocate and find a middle ground with the person. This theme does a lot to show that personality type doesn’t necessarily play a role in how people will respond to intimate levels of self-disclosure, which is interesting considering the differences between the groups in regards to their own disclosure techniques.

Perhaps the most striking similarity between the groups, however, is that of situations in which they feel comfortable when someone has disclosed intimate information to them initially. All of the participants, albeit one who self-identified as both introverted and extraverted, stated that they have had an instance where a person self-disclosing to them has made them feel more comfortable with the person, and all three of the extravert participants articulated that it almost always makes them feel more comfortable with the individual. When taking into consideration the differences between the typical disclosure techniques of the two groups, it’s fascinating to see the similarities between the two when faced with situations in which the other individual does what the self-identified introverted and extraverted group tends not to do: disclose.

Next, a vital difference between the two groups is topics that they avoid discussing in new relationships. Three of the participants in the self-identified introverted and extraverted group stated that they avoid talking about personal issues such as family/relationship matters, while all three of the extravert participants simply stated that they avoid topics of politics and
religion. This theme has several important implications, that will be discussed further in the next section.

**Implications**

The themes that emerged throughout the study resulted in several implications for the future. The biggest of these is the relationship between personality type and unconventional methods of self-disclosure. There was a distinct connection between how quickly it takes to warm up to someone with typical disclosure techniques in new relationships. For the participants who self-identified as introverted and extraverted, two of the four participants said it took them awhile to warm up to people, and three of the four stated that they don’t typically disclose to people who aren’t close friends. Interestingly enough, however, this played a small role in if those same participants feel more comfortable with an individual when the other person is the one self-disclosing to them, as three of the four participants who self-identify as introverted and extraverted stated that this is the case. This could show that one of the ways that an individual, who otherwise might take a while to warm up to someone, could do so is through the other person self-disclosing intimate information to them first. This finding has significant implications, as the relational success of unconventional methods of self-disclosure can be linked to the timing of such a disclosure when interacting with a person who isn’t strictly an extravert. If such a disclosure occurs after there is a “warming up” period in the interaction, it could considerably increase the likelihood of a positive reaction from the individual who wouldn’t typically engage in such disclosures themselves.

Another key theme that emerged was the relationship between personality type and the trajectory of relationships that began with non-normative self-disclosure. This study showed that
extraverts have a much greater chance of experiencing relational success in instances where the relationship began unconventionally. Not only did they become close with the person, but they never experienced de-escalation as a result of the relationship itself. This differs from the experience of people who self-identify as both introverted and extraverted, as all four experienced de-escalation in the relationship after initially growing close, with half being due to the nature of the relationship, and the other half due to external circumstances. This shows that the relational success of non-normative self-disclosure in the early stages of a relationship can depend on the personality type of the person with whom one is disclosing to.

Another big implication of the study is the connection between topics they avoid discussing with the other themes. Three of the participants who self-identify as both introverted and extraverted stated that they avoid talking about personal issues, while the only topics the extraverts avoided talking about were politics and religion. As such, a correlation can be drawn between willingness to talk about oneself with all of the other themes. Based on the results, a willingness to talk about oneself when interacting with a new individual can be related to extraversion, warming up quickly to people, self-disclosing to people even if they don’t consider them a close friend, and feeling more comfortable with a person when they self-disclose to them. This implies that the relational success of unconventional methods of self-disclosure in new relationships can be largely affected by whether the person is an extravert or not.

A connection can also be drawn, however, between the topics a person who self-identifies as introverted and extraverted avoids discussing and the situations in which they feel uncomfortable in response to self-disclosure. While three of the four participants stated that they avoid talking about personal issues in new relationships, all four of the participants
described the self-disclosure situations that made them feel uncomfortable were when the other individual disclosed topics that were very personal. This implies that, no matter the situation, an individual who self-identifies as introverted and extraverted simply feels uncomfortable discussing personal matters with people other than their close friends. This implies that, in addition to personality type playing a role in the relational success of unconventional methods of self-disclosure, the actual type of information that’s being disclosed also plays a large role, specifically when the individual doesn’t identify strictly as an extravert.

**Limitations and Suggestions For Future Research**

The findings of this study should be considered in light of several key limitations. First, the sample size was not only small, but also not generalizable across situations. Only eight participants were interviewed, and all of these participants were white male college-aged students between the ages of 21 and 23. By having such a small sample of participants from which the data was drawn, the results of the study shouldn’t be considered across various contexts. In the future, researchers would benefit from not only interviewing a larger number of people, but also a greater variety of people. This could include interviewing both men and women, people of different age groups, and/or people of different race, ethnicities and background. This would account for individual differences not only in personality type, but also in background, and could be used to see if any of these other factors play a role in an individual’s perception of unconventional methods of self-disclosure.

In addition, since only one introvert was interviewed, the data collected from his interview was tough to incorporate into the overall discussion of the study. As such, the groups of participants who self-identify as both introverted and extraverted and strictly extraverts were
discussed much more heavily than the one introvert, which excludes a wide variety of people who would otherwise contribute to the findings of the study. In the future, researchers would also benefit from interviewing a greater number of introverts, and comparing their responses to those of the other two personality types. This would allow to see a greater number of potential similarities and differences between the groups, and make the study more generalizable. In particular, interviewing more introverts in regards to RQ2 would be very beneficial, as that was the only relationship that did not experience much relational closeness or escalation as a result of the initial non-normative self-disclosure.

Conclusion

In the past, research has been scarce on the reason that who you disclose to matters when dealing with unconventional methods of self-disclosure. This study examined the impact of personality type in regards to introversion, extraversion, and individuals who self-identify as both introverted and extraverted on the relational success of unconventional methods of self-disclosure in new relationships. The results of this study show that personality can play a large role in the relational success of unconventional methods of self-disclosure in new relationships.

Individuals who identify as an extravert will be more likely to positively react to unconventional methods of self-disclosure in new relationships, and will experience greater relational closeness as a result of initial experiences of non-normative self-disclosure. In addition, while someone who identifies as both introverted and extraverted will be less likely to self-disclose themselves, they will still tend to react positively and feel more comfortable with an individual who engages in unconventional methods of self-disclosure with them first. However,
while they may be more likely to experience this initial comfort and subsequent greater relational
closeness with this person, they also may be less likely to maintain closeness in this relationship,
and may experience a de-escalation period.

One of the factors that can impact the success of such interactions for both groups are the
type of topics that are being disclosed. For the group of people who self-identified as both
introverted and extraverted, they tended to not only avoid discussing personal issues themselves,
but also felt uncomfortable when such information was disclosed to them. The success of such
an interaction was also affected by timing, as these groups of people tend to take longer to warm
up to a person they recently met.

In the future, researchers should create a larger sample size of people to interview, as
well as alter the demographics of the study to include both genders, a wider age gap, and people
of various backgrounds and ethnicities. Researchers should also interview a greater number of
strictly introverts in order to gather more correlations between personality types. Overall, while
everybody has different personal characteristics, this study can be used as a foundation to
determine the situations in which unconventional methods of self-disclosure can be either
beneficial or detrimental to the future of the potential relationship.
References


Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Introverts and Extraverts</th>
<th>Extraverts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generally open or closed</td>
<td>All four participants described themselves as an open person. Half “warm up” quickly to</td>
<td>All three participants described themselves as open people, who immediately</td>
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<tr>
<td>off/Time taken to warm up to people</td>
<td>people, while the other half said it takes them a while to become comfortable with the</td>
<td>“warm up” to people in new interactions.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>person.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Typical disclosure techniques</td>
<td>Three of the participants do not typically disclose to people who aren’t close friends,</td>
<td>All three of the participants stated that they generally tend to self-disclose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>while one stated that he does, but only when it involves the topic of romance.</td>
<td>to people even if they don’t consider them a close friend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncomfortable self-disclosure topics</td>
<td>All of the participants described topics that involved very personal information that</td>
<td>Two of the participants described discomfort when people disclose romantic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>made them uncomfortable, which were sexuality, depression, or divorced parents.</td>
<td>information initially, while the other felt discomfort when the topic was</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All four participants listen to what the person is saying, and try to be kind and</td>
<td>too personal and he didn’t know how to respond.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>supportive in their response. ¾ said they try to reciprocate with relevant information if</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>they can.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfortable self-disclosure situations</td>
<td>Three of the participants stated that they feel more comfortable with a person when the</td>
<td>All three of the participants also stated that they feel more comfortable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>individual discloses personal information with them.</td>
<td>with a person when the individual discloses personal information with them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topics they avoid discussing</td>
<td>Three of the participants stated that they avoid talking about personal issues such as</td>
<td>All three of the participants stated that they avoid the topics of politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>family/relationship matters, while only one mentioned politics and religion.</td>
<td>and religion when first interacting with someone.</td>
</tr>
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Appendix A

Relational Closeness Level

Eventful Turning Points