

## Self-disclosure Patterns of Japanese and Americans

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Ever since its development, Jourard's self-disclosure questionnaire (Jourard, 1958) has been used in a broad variety of research settings to probe dimensions of inter-personal communication, primarily among American respondents. While some research with Subjects of other nations has been reported (Plog, 1965), it has, by and large, been done using English-speaking Subjects (Melikian, 1962).

With the increasing awareness of Japan's presence in the market place and on the U. S. domestic scene, interest in the communicative patterns of its people has likewise intensified. One extensive study comparing Japan and America is that of Barnlund (1975). He investigated the "communicative styles" of Japan and America on a variety of levels including that of self-disclosure. (His study does not, however, indicate whether it was done in Japanese or in English.) Three major conclusions from the self-disclosure phase of his research are: (1) there was considerable consistency between the two cultures regarding topical priorities. He found in both cultures a greater willingness to discuss personal tastes in food, books, and films than personal traits, finances, etc. There were slight differences on specific questions, but they appeared "random and inconsequential" (P. 75); (2) Barnlund also found a "clear hierarchy of target persons." Both Japanese and Americans ranked friends highest as people to whom they disclose most, and parents next, but the American scores were higher overall. Americans self-disclosed to both parents almost equally, but for Japanese, self-disclosure to fathers dropped off considerably.

Although Barnlund found that Americans self-disclosed considerably more overall, he did not find any significant difference between males and females in either culture. A number of U.S. studies have reported higher disclosure scores among females than males, however (Jourard and Lasakow, 1958; Jourard, 1958).

Results from studies such as Barnlund's are useful when it comes to comparing the communicative characteristics of different cultures. One question left unaddressed, however, is the extent to which willingness to discuss a particular topic may be related to the perceived intimacy of that topic. That is, if a topic is perceived as more intimate, there should be less willingness to talk about it with others, and vice-versa. It seems reasonable to assume that perception of topic intimacy will vary from culture to culture.

The purpose of this investigation is to determine if Barnlund's findings can be replicated and to explore the differences of perception of topic intimacy level between the two cultures. If Barnlund's finding that Japanese disclose less than Americans holds true, then it seems quite likely that these topics will also be regarded as more intimate for Japanese than for Americans.

## Method

*Subjects.* Respondents for this experiment were drawn from two different colleges: one American, the other Japanese. They ranged in age from 18 to 22. The Americans ( $n=18$ ) were in Japan (where the experiment was conducted) for a short-term study program and were asked to participate during that time. There were 7 male and 9 female students. (Two Ss failed to provide this information.) The larger Japanese sample was made up of regularly enrolled students of a liberal arts college in northern Japan, originally 31 male and 127 female, but in order to obtain equal cells for gender, the data for all except 31 females were deleted. All were single.

## Self-disclosure Patterns of Japanese and Americans

*Procedure.* Jourard's twenty-five item self-disclosure scale (Jourard, 1971) was prepared in English for the American Ss. A Japanese translation was prepared by a senior college seminar under the guidance of their American professor, who can speak and read Japanese. These scales were then administered in classroom settings. The items dealt with a broad range of topics from personal tastes and activities to those regarding personality, finances, and inner feelings. The form that was used identified five communicative targets: mother, father, same-sex friend, opposite-sex friend, and teacher. These five were assumed to hold significant positions in the communicative experience of students.

Respondents were asked to follow two procedures: (1) They were asked to rate each of the 25 items on a scale of 1-5 for degree of intimacy according to whether or not they would be willing to talk about that item with a person whom they had met for the first time. (2) They were asked to indicate to what extent each of the targets now "knows the pertinent facts" about themselves. They were to indicate this by marking 0 if the respondent had not informed the target about that aspect of himself, 1 if the other person had a general but not complete idea of what was true about the respondent, and 2 if the other person was fully acquainted with the respondent in this respect. Responses were then summed to obtain scores representing amount of self-disclosure to each target. There were 25 items and 5 targets requiring each respondent to make a total of 125 entries in the second part of the questionnaire.

## Results

Table 1 presents the self-disclosure scores for Japanese and American respondents with their rank from highest to lowest in parentheses. A oneway analysis of variance indicates more self-disclosure for Americans than for Japanese overall and for three of

Table 1. Comparison of Japanese and American Amount of Self-disclosure.

Target	Japanese	American	(p<)
Father	(4) 22.26	(4) 30.83	.002
Mother	(2) 27.11	(1) 33.67	.019
Same-sex friend	(1) 31.48	(2) 31.42	
Opposite-sex friend	(3) 23.20	(3) 31.25	.041
Teacher	(5) 3.65	(5) 6.75	
Total	107.70	133.92	.007

the five targets. The rank ordering of amount of self-disclosure differs at one point: Japanese respondents reveal most to same-sex friends and secondly to mothers, but for Americans the order is reversed. The range of means for the highest four targets is much broader for Japanese Ss than for Americans, due to the low score for fathers and opposite-sex friends. Amount of self-disclosure to same-sex friends is nearly equivalent. Americans tend to reveal more to their teachers than do Japanese, but the difference is not significant.

When gender differences are examined, it becomes apparent that American females disclose more than do their Japanese counterparts overall ( $P < .01$ ) and to two of the targets: mother and same-sex friend. Japanese males tend to reveal more to Same-sex friends than American males, but none of the male differences reached significant levels. No gender differences were observable within either the Japanese or the American sample.

The intimacy ratings for individual topics are shown in Figure 1 for the Japanese and American respondents. The U.S. ratings (1.24 to 4.71 on a scale of 5) are spread over a broader range than the Japanese ratings (2.07 to 4.22), but analysis of variance tests indicate differences only for the less intimate items (asterisked). This leads to the observation that Japanese perceive a large group of topics as more intimate than Americans. The rankings *per se* do not differ

Self-disclosure Patterns of Japanese and Americans

Table 2. Self-disclosure of American and Japanese Males and Females

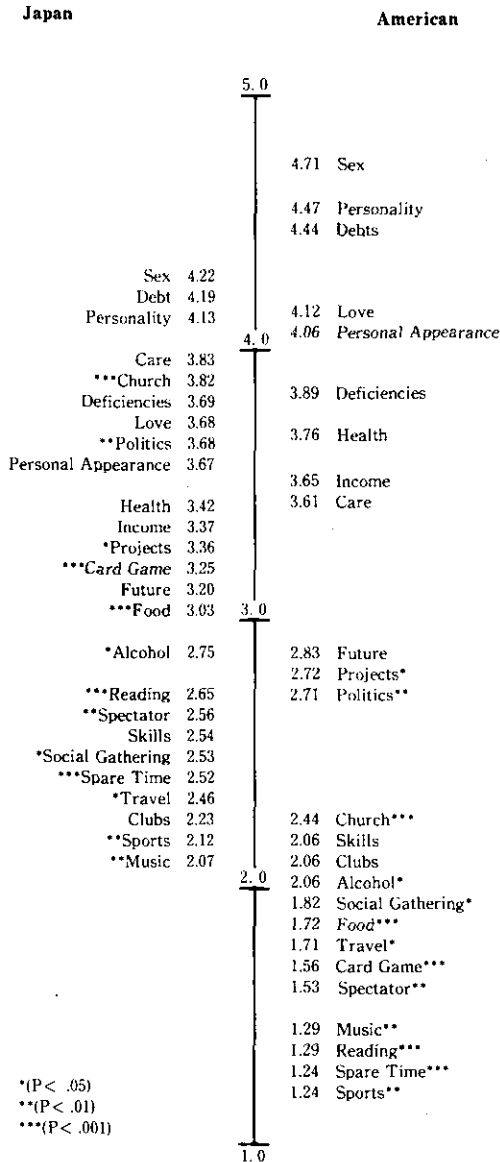
Target	Males		Females	
	Japanese	American	Japanese	American
Father	22.70	28.20	21.77	33.25
Mother	24.93	27.75	28.96	36.63 (.012)
Same-Sex Friend	31.41	27.25	31.63	33.50
Opposite-Sex	23.22	23.25	23.96	35.25 (.027)
Teacher	4.11	5.00	3.17	7.63
Total	107.92	109.25	107.45	146.25 (.003)

greatly except for two topics: politics and church, both of which rate significantly higher in intimacy level for Japanese. A general cleavage of high and low-disclosure topics as described by Jourard and Lasakow(1958) is also observable. A comparison of summed intimacy ratings indicates significantly higher ratings for Japanese (78.49) than for Americans (66.73) ( $P < .01$ ).

Mean total self-disclosure scores for each topic were obtained by adding the amount of self-disclosure to each of the five targets for each participant. The results can be seen in Figure 2. Although substantial differences in score can be observed, only seven items are of such magnitude as to be statistically different ( $P < .05$ ). They are marked with asterisks.

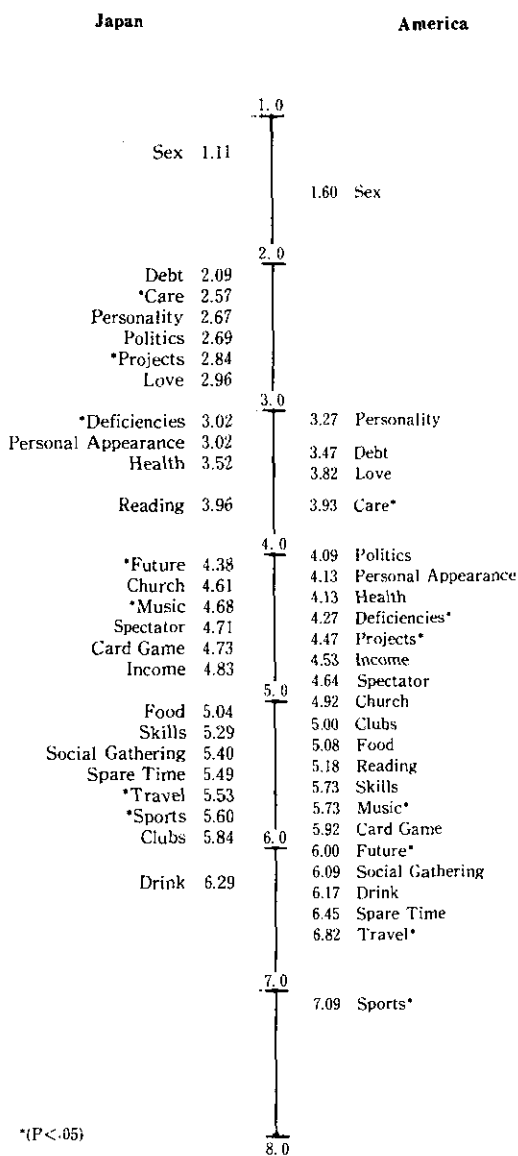
In order to check the correlation of intimacy level with self-disclosure topic scores, a Pearson Correlation technique was used for the total sample. Nineteen of the twenty-five comparisons proved to be statistically significant ( $P < .05$ ). Rs ranged from  $-.19$  to  $-.41$ . It appears reasonable to conclude that intimacy ratings correlate highly with their concomitant self-disclosure scores.

Figure 1. Rank Ordering of Topic Intimacy



# Self-disclosure Patterns of Japanese and Americans

## Figure 2. Rank Ordering of Topic Disclosure



## Discussion

The hierarchy of target persons in this study was not so clear-cut for the American sample. With less than a four point difference among the parent and friend targets, it appears difficult to draw any firm conclusion except that there is little difference. With the Japanese sample, however, there is a greater spread of scores. Both Fathers and Opposite-sex friends are less likely to be self-disclosure targets. The Father scores are in line with Barnlund's findings that scores for Father fall off considerably.

The results for opposite-sex friends, however, appear to be lower than Barnlund's findings. One explanation for this result might be the difference in sample between a large urban area (where Barnlund's sample was drawn from) and more rural northern Japan. The fact that there is little dating activity among students may be a factor influencing this result. The low score for teachers as targets is hardly surprising. It seems clear that teachers are not significant communicative targets for students in either country!

The higher overall self-disclosure score for Americans makes sense in light of the fact that the American sample perceived the topics generally as less intimate. It is probably axiomatic that a person will disclose more highly about less intimate topics. It seems reasonable to assert that given the same intimacy ranking, Americans and Japanese will disclose equally regarding a given topic, assuming that it is a topic of viable interest and concern. One point of difference between the two groups in this respect is the topic of *church* in this study. Americans might tend to perceive this topic as a normal conversational topic. To Japanese, however, very few of whom have had any church experience, it would be taken as a more personal, private topic, less readily disclosed to others.

The intimacy ratings obtained in this study would tend to con-



firm Barnlund's statement that "the total area of the self accessible to others through communication is significantly smaller in Japan than in the United States" (Barnlund, p. 80)

Nevertheless, the general pattern of topical priority remains very similar. Those topics disclosed more fully are those assigned to high-disclosure topics: personal tastes, activities and interests. Low disclosure topics are those of a more private nature. There are no startling cross-overs in topic ranking. Hence, the "considerable consistency" found by Barnlund is confirmed.

### Conclusion

A 25 item self-disclosure questionnaire (in Japanese and English) was used to compare self-disclosure scores and item intimacy ratings of 62 Japanese and 18 American college students in Japan. Five targets were rated: Mother, Father, Same-friend, Opposite-sex friend, and Teacher. Results indicate that Americans disclose more overall, as expected, and to Father, Mother, and Opposite-sex friend than do their Japanese counterparts. American females disclose more than Japanese females, but no difference was observed in males. While topic priority rankings were similar, Japanese Ss tended to rank topics as more intimate than Americans, and disclosed less about them. Significantly high negative correlations were found between intimacy rankings and self-disclosure scores.

### References

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## APPENDIX

### Self-disclosure Questionnaire

#### Instructions

Below there is a list of topics that pertain to you. We want you to do two things with this list. First, to the left of each item on the list, you will notice a series of numbers from 1 to 5. If you would be willing to talk about this item with a person you have met for the first time, circle 5. If you would not be willing to talk at all about this item with such a person, circle 1. If your response is somewhere in between, choose a number that you feel is appropriate.

After you have finished marking these items, turn to the *answer sheet* provided on the following page. We want you to indicate on the answer sheet the degree to which you have let each of several people in your life know this information about you.

You have a reasonably good idea of how much about yourself you have let each of the people know about you in the past, and how current and up-to-date their knowledge about you is at the present.

Therefore, will you indicate on the answer sheet the extent to which each of the other persons now knows the pertinent facts about you. In other words, how complete, up-to-date, and accurate is their picture of you as you are now? Use the following scale to indicate your answers:

- 0: The other person doesn't know me in this respect right now, because I haven't told him, or let him know in any other way.
- 1: The other person has a general idea of how I am now, of what is

## Self-disclosure Patterns of Japanese and Americans

true in this respect, but his idea of me is not complete, or up-to-date.

- 2: The other person fully knows me as I now am now in this respect, because I have talked about this topic to him fully in the recent past, and things have not changed. I have kept him fully informed about this aspect of me.

### Information about Oneself

- 1 2 3 4 5 1. What you like to do most in your in your spare time at home, e.g., read, sports, go out, etc.
- 1 2 3 4 5 2. The kind of party or social gathering that you enjoy most.
- 1 2 3 4 5 3. Your usual and favorite spare-time reading material, e.g., novels, non-fiction, science fiction, poetry, etc.
- 1 2 3 4 5 5. The sports you engage in most, if any, e.g., golf, swimming, tennis, baseball, etc.
- 1 2 3 4 5 6. Whether or not you know and play any card games, e.g., bridge, poker, gin rummy, etc.
- 1 2 3 4 5 7. Whether or not you will drink alcoholic beverages; if so, your favorite drinks-beer, wine, gin, brandy, whiskey, etc.
- 1 2 3 4 5 8. The foods you like best, and the ways you like food prepared; e.g., rare steak, etc.
- 1 2 3 4 5 9. Whether or not you belong to any church; if so, which one, and the usual frequency of attending.
- 1 2 3 4 5 10. Whether or not you belong to any clubs, fraternity, civic organizations; if so, the names of these organizations.
- 1 2 3 4 5 11. Any skills you have mastered, e.g., arts and crafts, painting, sculpture, woodworking, auto repair, knitting, weaving, etc.
- 1 2 3 4 5 12. Whether or not you have any favorite spectator sports; if so, what these are, e.g., boxing, wrestling, football, basketball, etc.
- 1 2 3 4 5 13. The places that you have travelled to, or lived in during your life-other countries, cities, states.
- 1 2 3 4 5 14. What your political sentiments are at present-your views on state and federal government policies of interest to you.
- 1 2 3 4 5 15. Whether or not you have been seriously in love during your

- life before this year ; if so, with whom, what the details were, and the outcome.
- 1 2 3 4 5 16. The names of the people in your life whose care and happiness you feel in some way directly responsible for.
- 1 2 3 4 5 17. The personal deficiencies that you would most like to improve, or that you are struggling to do something about at present, e.g., appearance, lack of knowledge, loneliness, temper, etc.
- 1 2 3 4 5 18. Whether or not you presently owe money ; if so, how much, and to whom?
- 1 2 3 4 5 19. The kind of future you are aiming toward, working for, planning for—both personally and vocationally, e.g., marriage and family, professional status, etc.
- 1 2 3 4 5 20. Whether or not you are now involved in any projects that you would not want to interrupt at present—either socially, personally, or in your work ; what these projects are.
- 1 2 3 4 5 21. Whether or not you have sex problems, and the nature of these problems, if any.
- 1 2 3 4 5 22. Your problems and worries about your personality, that is, what you dislike most about yourself, any guilts, inferiority feelings, etc.
- 1 2 3 4 5 23. How you feel about the appearance of your body—your looks, figure, weight—what you dislike and what you accept in your appearance, and how you wish you might change your looks to improve them.
- 1 2 3 4 5 24. Your thoughts about your health, including any problems, worries, or concerns that you might have at present.
- 1 2 3 4 5 25. An exact idea of your regular income. (If a student, of your usual combined allowance and earnings, if any.)

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