



# Social Penetration Theory.

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Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor

Altman, I. & Taylor, D. (1973). Social penetration: The development of interpersonal relationships. New York: Holt



# Intimacy and Self-Disclosure

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- Social penetration refers to the process of relationship bonding whereby individuals move from superficial communication to more intimate communication.
- Trajectory.



# Intimacy

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- Intimacy exists at many levels beyond physical intimacy.
- These levels include dimensions such as intellectual, emotional, and shared activities.



# Self-disclosure

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- 1. Self-disclosure refers to the process of revealing information about oneself to others.
- 2. Nonintimate relationships typically progress to an intimate level because of self-disclosure.
- 3. Self-disclosure can be either strategic (planned) or nonstrategic (spontaneous).



# Reciprocity

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- **Reciprocity** refers to the process whereby one person's openness leads to another's openness.



# The “onion”

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- The **outer layer** of the onion represents an individual's **public image**, or those characteristics about a person that are visible to others (e.g., gender, race, height).
- The **central layers** of the onion represent those aspects of the self that are revealed through self-disclosure. (beliefs, faith)
- The **inner core** are values, self-concept, and deeply held emotions.



# Breadth and Depth

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- Breadth refers to the number of topics discussed in a relationship.
- Depth refers to the degree of intimacy that guides topic discussions.



# Dynamic relationship

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- Vulnerable in the relationship.
- Trust
- If too much private information is revealed early in the relationship, it may make the other partner uncomfortable and motivate him or her to end the relationship



# Four stages

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- Orientation stage – public, superficial
- Exploratory affective - casual, friendly
- Affective exchange stage - close friends and intimate partners
- Stable exchange stage



# Stable exchange stage

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- Communication is characterized by open expression of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, which results in a high degree of spontaneity.
- Partners are highly intimate and synchronized, with the ability to predict one another's behavior.
- Few misinterpretations in meanings at this stage because the partners are so familiar with one another.
- “Dyadic uniqueness,” or distinctive relationship qualities such as humor and sarcasm, emerge.
- Few relationships ever reach this stage.



# Cross Cultural Differences

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- Gudykunst et al. (1996 p. 702) found cultural differences:
- individualist cultures disclose more than collectivistic
- collectivistic cultures disclose more about group membership than about personal information.