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Responsiveness and Self-Disclosure

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In recent years, the concept of responsiveness has been used in investigations of self-disclosure (e.g., Berg & Archer, 1980, 1983; Davis & Perkowitz, 1979), social exchange phenomena (e.g., Berg, Blaylock, Camarillo, & Steck, 1985; Clark & Mills, 1979; Kelley, 1979), and friendship formation (e.g., Berg & Clark, 1986; Berg & McQuinn, 1986). It is the intent of this chapter to explore the applicability of responsiveness to self-disclosure phenomena in a more extensive and systematic fashion than has been heretofore possible. In doing this, I will first review usages of the term responsiveness and the research that supports its existence as an independent construct. In so doing, a distinction will be made between two general forms of responsiveness: conversational responsiveness and relational responsiveness. The consequences of responsive action and the aspects of an action that lead to its being judged as responsive are then presented. Following this presentation of the concept of responsiveness, various aspects of self-disclosure and findings in the self-disclosure literature will be examined as they relate to responsiveness. Finally, the limitations of present findings dealing with responsiveness and self-disclosure will be noted, and directions for future investigation will be discussed.

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RESPONSIVENESS

Classes and Aspects of Responsive Actions

The term *responsiveness* was first applied to self-disclosure settings by Davis and Perkowitz (1979). In their study of communicative interactions, Davis and Perkowitz defined responsiveness in terms of the extent that replies to another's communication met three demands implicit in that communication. These are (a) that the other respond in some way, (b) that the response address the content of preceding communication, and (c) that the response be characterized by a suitable degree of elaboration (i.e., that the initial speaker intended to elicit). Davis and Holtgraves (1984) have noted a fourth implicit demand of communication—that the latency for the response be appropriate (as determined by cultural norms, individual preferences, or rhythmic patterns of the communicating dyad). The reply made to another is considered to be responsive to the degree that the other perceives it as meeting these four demands.

A somewhat different usage of the term *responsiveness* was made by Clark and Mills (1979) in their studies of communal (close) and exchange (not close) relationships. They held that communal relationships operated in accordance with a norm of mutual responsiveness by which they meant that each person benefited the other because the other needed some particular resource and without any expectation that the other make repayment. In fact, they present evidence indicating that if such return payment is made, it can have the effect of undermining the relationship. A very similar point was made by Kelley (1979) when he noted that one of the primary characteristics of a close personal relationship was that participants would demonstrate increased responsiveness. By this he meant that each person would consider the other's outcomes (rewards and costs) as well as their own when allocating resources or deciding how to act.

Miller and Berg (1984) employ the term *responsiveness* in a way that appears to bridge these other usages. They view responsiveness as "the extent to which and the way in which one participant's actions address the previous actions, communications, needs, or wishes of another participant in that interaction" (p. 191). They then go on to distinguish two general classes of actions through which one person indicates that he or she is addressing the other's previous behaviors, communications, needs, or wishes. These are conversational responsiveness ("behaviors made by the recipient of another's communication through which the recipient indicates interest in and understanding of that communication" [p. 193]