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## COMMUNICATIONAL AND INTERACTIONAL ASPECTS OF SELF-DISCLOSURE: A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THEORY AND METHOD\*

As Parry (1967: 45) noted, “. . . the greater part of human converse is a transaction in content”; yet the study of information content is notoriously difficult.<sup>1</sup> Part of the problem stems from the enormous variety of particular, specific contents that can be transacted verbally. This article, however, is concerned with the theoretical and methodological issues involved in the study of two particular CLASSES of information content. Authors from different vantage points have consistently recognized important distinctions between two main categories of information: a class of affectively-tinged, personal type of content contrasted with a more emotionally neutral, instrumental type. Recent conceptual developments in communication theory provide a comprehensive framework for the study of these two types of information. A preliminary attempt is made here to render some of these concepts operational for the study of self-disclosure.

From a naturalistic and empirical viewpoint, it is evident that the themes of our interactions ordinarily vary from the work-oriented topics of the nine to five hours to the more personal transactions occurring in the family or other intimate relationships. More precise clinical observations also substantiate this distinction. Communication in psychotherapy (in contrast, for instance, with a business or scientific meeting), emphasizes the transaction of a type of information which focuses upon aspects of the self such as feelings, attitudes, moods, and relationships with significant others. Information of a more factual, extrinsic nature is mainly an adjunct of secondary relevance. It may in fact be regarded as ‘resistance’ should it become the main focus of interaction.

*Semiotic considerations.* Morris (1946) contends that a primary concern among semioticians is the establishment of functional and behavioral differentiations among signs. He cites the pioneering work of Odgen and Richards in differentiating functional characteristics of signs used in scien-