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The effect of incompetence in self-disclosure on interpersonal attraction

Richard A. Stevick
Messiah College, rstevick@messiah.edu

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THE EFFECT OF INCOMPETENCE IN SELF-DISCLOSURE
ON INTERPERSONAL ATTRACTION

by

RICHARD ALLEN STEVICK, B.A., M.S. in Ed.

A DISSERTATION

IN

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## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</th>
<th>ii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### CHAPTER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. INTRODUCTION</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Hypotheses</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Effect of Perceived Competence-Incompetence</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling-Failure Message Variables</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES</th>
<th>26</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Design and Analysis</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjects</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrument</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Variables</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedural Checks</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructions and Debriefing</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| IV. RESULTS                                          | 33  |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS</th>
<th>39</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major Findings</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodological Considerations</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications of the Findings</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestions for Future Research</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Treatment 1, Condition A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Treatment 1, Condition B</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Treatment 2, Condition A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Treatment 2, Condition B</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Treatment 2, Condition C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. T test Results for Pilot Semantic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differential</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Interpersonal Judgment Scale</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Attractiveness Score in Pratfall Study by Aronson Et Al.</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Means and Standard Deviations for Attraction Ratings: All Possible Combinations</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Source Table for the Factorial Analysis of Variance: Total Interpersonal Attractiveness Measure</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Source Table for the Factorial Analysis of Variance: Liking—Interpersonal Attractiveness Measure</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Source Table for the Factorial Analysis of Variance: Future Interactions—Interpersonal Attractiveness Measure (Item 6)</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**LIST OF FIGURES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Hypothesized Findings</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Treatment Cells</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Experimental Treatment in Each Cell</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Pilot Study</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Since Sidney Jourard's book *The Transparent Self* appeared in 1964, there has been a sustained and growing interest in the subject of self-disclosure. When Cozby (1973) did his survey of the literature published through 1971, he found 102 articles. From 1972 to the present, Psychological Abstracts alone has listed 570 additional studies, with ten new studies appearing monthly for the past six months.

One reason for this, according to Cozby (1973) and Chaikin and Derlega (1974) is that self-disclosure has received attention from researchers with diverse interests and orientations. For example, articles on self-disclosure appear in the context of counseling or encounter group functioning and therapeutic style (May & Thompson, 1973; Weigel, Dinges, Dyer, & Straumfjord, 1972; Hodge, 1968; Bennett, 1967; Culbert, 1966) social exchange processes (Worthy, Gary, & Kahn, 1969), dyadic relationship development (Lombardo & Fantasia, 1976; Sote & Good, 1974; Altman & Taylor, 1973), information management (Levin & Gergen, 1969), and speech and communication (Brooks, 1971; Stewart, 1973; Wenburg & Wilmot, 1973; Keltner, 1970).

In addition, specialists in the areas of home, family, and peer relations have examined self-disclosure and openness
as a technique for improving communication through the inter-personal skills training movement, e.g., marriage and conjugal relations (Rappaport, 1976; Wieman, 1973; Ely, Guerney, & Stover, 1973); pre-marital relations (Avery, Ridley, Leslie, & Milholland, 1977; Schlein, 1971; D'Augelli, 1974); parent and child relations (Ginsberg, 1977; Coufal, 1975); and peer relations (Rider, 1978; Haynes, 1977; Hatch & Guerney, 1975). This sample of studies illustrates the breadth of interest shown in self-disclosure in the last 15 years.

As Gilbert and Whiteneck (1976) pointed out, one of the characteristics of the earlier writings on the subject was to describe self-disclosure in global terms, with the underlying assumption that it is an all or nothing phenomenon, a unidimensional entity which is either present or not present. The emphasis in disclosure centered on its more existential attributes, such as genuineness, transparency, and congruence. As more research was done in the area and results were either ambiguous or contradictory, some writers such as Cozby (1973) posited that self-disclosure is really a complex phenomenon and that more attention would have to be given to the variables involved in order to find clear and useful results.

The author of this study wished to see what effect the perceived competence-incompetence of a discloser had on the recipients of a discloser message and whether or not
the way in which the message was given affected its reception. More specifically, he wanted to examine aspects of the relationship between self-disclosure and interpersonal attraction or liking.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of the competence-incompetence variable as it relates to the discloser and to the message itself in the self-disclosure transaction. The first question of interest was whether a negative feeling disclosure would result in greater attraction than would a negative behavior (failure) disclosure. The other main question of interest was whether a negative disclosure from a perceived competent source would result in increased attraction, while the same disclosure from a perceived incompetent source would result in decreased attraction.

The specific research questions to be answered were these:

1. Does the competence of a discloser affect his/her interpersonal attractiveness ratings for the recipient?
2. Will a person disclosing a negative-feeling message be more attractive to the recipient than a person disclosing a negative-behavior (failure) message?
3. Will a person's perceived competence-incompetence interact with a negative disclosure message to produce increased attraction for the competent discloser?
and reduced attraction toward the incompetent discloser?

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms are defined as they are used in this study:

**Self-disclosure**: voluntarily giving to others true information about oneself which would not otherwise normally be known.

**Failure disclosure**: a personal message in which a person admits to self-perceived or other-perceived defeats.

**Feeling disclosure**: a personal message which deals with one's frustrations or fear of failure.

**Non-disclosure**: a message dealing with non-personal, demographic kinds of information.

**Competence**: Achieving success in the profession for which one had originally prepared, e.g., in this study, receiving recognition for excellence in teaching and continuing to advance professionally.

**Incompetence**: The failure to achieve success in the profession for which one had originally prepared; dropping out and drifting into less professional employment.

**Liking or Interpersonal attractiveness**: The score on the Interpersonal Judgment Scale.

**Research Hypotheses**

The a priori hypotheses predicted in the present experiment were as follows:
(1) The perceived competent discloser will receive significantly higher attractiveness ratings on the Interpersonal Judgment Scale than will the perceived incompetent discloser.

(2) With respect to the disclosure message itself, the discloser who reveals a negative feeling disclosure will receive significantly higher attractiveness ratings on the Interpersonal Judgment Scale than will the discloser who reveals a negative failure disclosure.

(3) Hypothesis 2 will hold for both levels of competence, i.e., there will be no significant interaction between the perceived competence-incompetence of the discloser and whether the message is a negative feeling disclosure or a negative failure disclosure.

(4) There will be a significant interaction between the perceived competence-incompetence of the discloser when the non-disclosure condition is compared with either or both of the negative disclosure messages (failure, feeling, or a combination of the two) which will result in increased attractiveness of the perceived competent person and decreased attractiveness of the perceived incompetent person.

The following figure (Figure 1) illustrates the hypotheses:
Figure 1. Hypothesized Findings

Type of Disclosure Message

- Non-Disclosure
- Negative Failure Disclosure
- Negative Feeling Disclosure

Interpersonal Attractiveness

Competent Discloser

Incompetent Discloser
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Jourard (1964, 1971) is often cited as one of the first proponents for self-disclosure. He believed that "self-disclosure is a symptom of personality health and a means of ultimately achieving healthy personality" (1964, p. 5). He also stated that "perhaps the most important reason for self-disclosure is that without it we cannot truly love" (Jourard & Witman, 1971, p. 154). However, he was not the only early advocate of openness and disclosure. Mowrer (1961, 1964, 1971) believed that self-disclosure was essential for self healing. The works of Rogers (1961, 1963) and Maslow (1961, 1964, 1971) were often cited as support for the benefits inherent in authentic disclosure to other human beings. Thus, according to Tubbs and Baird (1976), the literature suggests that interpersonal self-disclosure serves to improve communication, to improve the quality of relationships, to fulfill the needs of the participants, and to improve one's self-concept.

With such pronouncements coming from the leading phenomenologists of that day that disclosure is a prerequisite for self-understanding, intimate relationships, and self-actualization, it is not surprising that many practitioners in the encounter and T-group movement quickly aligned themselves with these ideas and adopted a number of techniques to facilitate openness and disclosure (Burton, 1970;
Stoller, 1968a, 1968b, Gibb, 1964; Bradford, Gibb & Benne, 1964; and Schutz, 1967, 1973 (a), 1973 (b)). Although few of them explicitly advocated Bennett's position (1967), the more self-disclosure the better, some trainers designed strategies utilizing behavior modification tactics to increase self-disclosure among shy adolescents or designed studies in which the amount of proffered self-disclosure was the dependent variable. Ribner (1974) reported an experiment that utilized a contract calling for "enforced self-disclosure" through the use of individual contracts. Thus the assumption that more is better was built in. Few raised the question as to whether or not certain kinds of disclosure could have detrimental effects. The implication was that if there were risks in self disclosing, they were primarily risks of disclosing to "hate bombers," to use Jourard's term (1964, p. 4), those people who took intimate information and used it against the discloser. However, the far greater risk was that of unwillingness to disclose . . . a holding back which led to further alienation and misunderstanding.

Culbert (1968) suggested that sometimes a person, "the revealer" in his terms, might over-discoe in certain situations; and Luft (1969) described "the plunger" as one who discloses the hidden or private area at a rate too rapid for comfort. Nevertheless, these examples were not presented as serious problems. Sigmund Koch, however, in an
article for the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* (1971) noted what for him were serious objections and excesses in the move toward openness and self-disclosure:

As I read the literature, I occasionally run into isolated *en passant* warnings about "over-exposure." But very seldom. What I do run into, however, on almost every page are recommendations, advertisements, celebrations, hymns, about the cosmic values of openness, disclosure, exposure, honesty, directness, "letting oneself be known," transparency, and so on. The force of most of the theoretical rhetoric, of virtually all of the group-engineering devices of the experience-protocols of group leaders and members, creates an inescapable conclusion that belief in the growth-releasing potential of self-exposure is a dominant and pervasive premise of the movement. p. 116

Notwithstanding the debate surrounding the self-disclosure issue, a number of researchers were stating their belief that this phenomenon was indeed more complex than some of the early theorists had recognized. With the realization of the multidimensionality of self-disclosure, there came a greater awareness that endorsement of self-disclosure, per se, was perhaps an oversimplification; and as a result, researchers began to examine dimensions which heretofore had been neglected. Altman and Taylor (1973) and Cozby (1973) both offered three parameters of disclosure: breadth, or the amount of information disclosed; depth, or the intimacy of information; and duration, the length of time which one disclosed. Jourard (1971) had also suggested that honesty of the disclosure should be considered, and Pearce and Sharp (1973) indicated that a deliberate willingness to disclose, as opposed to unintentional disclosure, should be a possible
dimension. In factor analytic studies, Wheeless and Grotz (1975, 1976) labeled five dimensions of disclosure: consciously intended disclosure; amount of disclosure; positive-negative nature of the disclosure; honesty-accuracy of the disclosure; and control of the depth or intimacy of the disclosure. Jourard and Resnick (1970) and Vondracek and Marshall (1971) among others, examined the latter aspect of intimacy. Other researchers examined different components identified by Wheeless and Grotz (1975, 1976). For example, Blau (1964), Levinger and Senn (1967), Bienvenu (1970), Dies and Cohen (1976), Gilbert and Horenstein (1975), Gilbert and Whiteneck (1976), Hoffmann and Spencer (1977), Lynn (1978), and Sutton (1975) examined, among other things, the message variable of valence—the effects of a positive versus a negative self-disclosure. Chelune (1975) examined the dimensions of amount, intimacy, rate, affective manner of presentation, and self-disclosure flexibility. Derlega, Harris, and Chaiken (1973) also focused on message variables and examined deviant versus normal disclosure messages. Wortman and Adesman (1976) and Dies and Cohen (1976) looked specifically at the timing of the message.

The realization that self-disclosure is a complex phenomenon is well illustrated in the discussion section of an article by Jones and Gordon (1972) which focused on the variables of message valence, timing of the message (early or late in the conversation), reluctant versus willing
disclosure, and responsible versus chance attribution for the facts that were disclosed. As a result of their findings, they stated the following rather complex disclosure formula: if one has good fortune to disclose, it is unattractive to do so early in the relationship with another; however, if one has something bad to disclose, the timing is closely dependent on whether or not the person is assumed to be responsible for the bad fortune. It is better for the person responsible for his/her bad fortune to tell of it early in the relationship (perhaps before it is discovered inadvertently by the listener); however, if she/he is not responsible for the misfortune, she/he is liked better if she/he waits until later in the interview to offer this information.

This prescription clearly shows that self-disclosure had assumed a complexity which had been earlier overlooked when researchers simply measured it in terms of presence or absence, or in number of words disclosed.

Besides examining aspects of the message variable, many researchers focused on the attributes of the discloser, e.g., mental health and neuroticism of disclosers versus non-disclosers (see Cozby, 1973 and Derlega and Chaikin, 1975); religious background, nationality, race, Rorschach responsiveness, security, self esteem, flexibility, sex, and other discloser traits (Cozby, 1973; Gilbert, 1977; Gilbert & White-neck, 1976; Chelune, 1975; Jourard and Lasakow, 1958).
Of the three components of self-disclosure—the discloser, the message, and the recipient—the one which has tended in the past to receive the least attention is that of the recipient or target of the message: how does the recipient respond to various kinds of disclosers and various kinds of messages? This question has been examined by researchers in the counseling/psychotherapy area who have attempted to assess the effects of counselor self-disclosure upon the client (see Weiner, 1978). Again, findings are conflicting as to what to disclose and whether such disclosure enhances or hampers the therapeutic relationship.

One of the purposes of the present research was to examine the relationship between certain message and discloser variables and the attraction or liking which the target or recipient of the message has for the discloser. Results of earlier studies in this area indicate mixed findings. In one of the earliest studies, Jourard (1959) found that in a group of nine nursing instructors, the highest and the lowest disclosers in the group were liked the least. (With this limited sample, he began to hypothesize a curvilinear relationship between self-disclosure and appropriateness.) In a follow-up study with nine male graduate students (Jourard & Landsman, 1960), he failed to find any such relationship. Worthy, Gary, and Kahn (1969) used female subjects who exchanged information that was pre-ranked for intimacy and found a positive correlation between intimacy of self-
disclosure and interpersonal attraction. Taylor (1968) reported that over a thirteen week period, room mates' liking for high disclosers showed a steady decline from their initial high levels. Jourard and Friedman (1970) used an experimenter as a discloser and found that male subjects, in general, rated intimate disclosers more highly than they did non-intimate disclosers. Bankiotes and Daher (1974) reported a positive correlation between the amount a person disclosed and liking for the person. Lefkowitz (1970) reported that desire to date a person and liking scores for that person were greater in high versus low disclosing conditions.

Other researchers found no relationship between disclosing and liking, or else reported inconsistent findings. Erlich and Graeven (1971) had male subjects disclose to a confederate. The confederate, in return, disclosed either a high or low intimacy script. The authors found no effect on attraction. Weigel and Warnath (1968) reported no consistent relationship between liking and self-disclosure in group psychotherapy when the members rated each other. Query (1964) found that some high disclosers were liked and others were not. Derlega, Walmer, and Furman (1973) also found no significant attraction in a mutual disclosure experiment. Cozby (1972) reported that high disclosers were less liked by female subjects than moderate disclosers.
As studies on attraction and disclosure continued, researchers began to examine more complex aspects of the transaction. Derlega, Harris, and Chaikin (1973) found that conventional high disclosers were more liked than deviant disclosers (those who reported homosexual tendencies). Chaikin and Derlega (1974) studied the appropriateness of intimate disclosure versus non-disclosure messages to three different targets: stranger, casual acquaintance, or close friend. With the exception of the close friend condition, non-disclosure was judged to be more appropriate than disclosure, and the non-disclosers were liked more.

Petzelt (1973) examined liking for low, medium, and high disclosers and found that on a first encounter, the medium discloser was liked best, the low discloser second best, and the high discloser was liked least. Simonson and Bahr (1974) established a no-disclosure, demographic disclosure, and personal disclosure condition and found that paraprofessionals who made personal disclosures were liked most, whereas counseling psychologists making the same disclosures were liked least. These disclosures, however, were not disclosures of incompetence. Gilbert (1977) in comparing liking for low disclosers versus high, reported that the low disclosures were regarded as more appropriate and the low disclosers were liked better than the high disclosers. Lynn (1978) reported that attraction was not found to parallel disclosure level, whereas Kahn and
Rudestam (1971) found that in an encounter group, liking for a person was positively related to the amount of self-disclosure.

Once again, findings are conflicting and results are ambiguous. One probable cause for the equivocal findings is that in the variety of studies, self-disclosure assumed many guises and shapes. In some studies (Jourard, 1959; Jourard & Landsman, 1960), it was unstructured and global, emanating from interpersonal and group processes, whereas in other studies (Worthy, Gary & Kahn, 1969; Simonson & Bahr, 1974), the disclosure was very carefully controlled in a laboratory setting. However, the mixed findings from these studies on the relationship to interpersonal attraction parallels the author's observations in both the counseling and non-counseling settings; some people's disclosures appear to result in increased attraction and enhanced relationships whereas others' disclosures seem to result in the reverse.

At this point, it does not appear to be well understood what variables cause the target to react favorably to some disclosers or messages, and to withdraw from other disclosers rather than empathize, reciprocate, or otherwise respond in a positive manner. Undoubtedly, however, there are unspoken social norms, the violation of which will result in rejection by the recipient of the disclosure. The main purpose of this study was to examine the competence-
incompetence variable, whether related to the discloser or the message, and attempt to determine how it affected the interpersonal attraction of the recipient or target for the discloser.

**The Effect of Perceived Competence-Incompetence**

The literature of self-disclosure is silent on the effect of the competence-incompetence of the discloser as perceived by the target. Does this variable play a part in the acceptance or rejection of the discloser and message? Although not related to self-disclosure, per se, a number of studies have examined the role of competence-incompetence on interpersonal attractiveness. One of the difficulties, of course, in comparing findings in competence research is that there are no generally agreed upon definitions of competence. Thus, researchers define it operationally, as in this study, often using different degrees of intellectual or academic ability as the criteria. However, some studies (e.g., Stotland & Dunn, 1962; Stotland & Hillmer, 1962) used ability in word games or clerical tasks to differentiate competence from incompetence. With such variations in standards of competence, one can expect mixed results and must also use caution in generalizing from them.

It is probably not surprising, however, that no matter how the condition was established, most of the studies found that competent people were more attractive than
incompetent. When nothing else about a person was known except his/her ability level, Stotland and Hillmer (1962) found the higher ability person was more liked. Also Stotland and Dunn (1962) and Iverson (1964) found that even when subjects expected to receive no benefits from the more competent person, they still preferred them. Spence and Helmreich (1972) reported that their male subjects preferred competent women to incompetent; Teague (1973) reported the same findings with female subjects. Aronson, Willerman, and Floyd (1966) and Helmreich, Aronson, and LeFan (1970) also found that their subjects rated competent people as more attractive than they did incompetent people. Jellison and Davis (1973) reported that college students liked their high ability peers significantly more than low ability peers.

On the other hand, Gibb (1954) reported a negative correlation between liking and competence. Kiesler, Weizman, and Pallack (1967) found that competent persons were liked less than incompetent persons, but a closer reading of the study indicated that the "competent" confederate was instructed to act in an arrogant manner, whereas the "incompetent" confederate was supposed to act bumbling and hesitating. Consequently, the incompetent stimulus person arrived late to the experiment, dropped his coat on the floor, and while reaching for it, knocked his books off the table. When he was finally ready, he discovered he had no pencil.
With some evident disgust, the experimenter handed him a pencil, but as the incompetent went to fill out his form, he broke the pencil and had to borrow another. In the competent condition, the confederate demonstrated his supposed competence by raising one eyebrow in disgust, using a condescending tone of voice, and otherwise acting in a cavalier manner. It is very possible that the ratings of competence were really responses to the arrogance instead. Thus, the majority of studies on competence show that in our society, at least, competent people are preferred to incompetent.

This author's interest in the possible relationship between self-disclosure and perceived competence-incompetence of the discloser stemmed initially from a study by Aronson, et al. (1966) which focused, not on competence and self-disclosure, but on competence and the effects of a blunder, or pratfall, to use Aronson's term. In the study, they established the degree of competence of the stimulus persons by having two different students trying out for the university College Bowl team. Success in the College Bowl, a competitive television program, required prompt and informed responses to presumably difficult questions. In the competent condition, the candidate brilliantly handled 92% of the very difficult questions; in the incompetent condition, he answered only 30%. It was hypothesized that the competent stimulus person would be more attractive than the incompetent. This hypothesis was confirmed. The area of
interest in this study, however, was not the likely finding that competence was more attractive than incompetence but what effect a person's competence/incompetence had on his/her attractiveness in the presence of negative information... in this case the pratfall of spilling coffee on oneself. Aronson's hypothesis was that the occurrence of this negative event would interact with the stimuli's perceived competence to result in increased attraction for the competent blunderer and in reduced attraction to the incompetent blunderer. This hypothesis was confirmed. The means are given in Table 1:

**TABLE 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ATTRACTIVENESS SCORE IN PRATFALL STUDY BY ARONSON ET AL.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before pratfall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incompetent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The competent blunderer gained in attractiveness, whereas the incompetent diminished in attractiveness.

In a follow up study which utilized the same setting, Helmreich, Aronson, and LeFan (1970) found similar interaction with subjects of average self esteem. In another study similar to the original pratfall research, Keisler and Goldberg (1968) again focused on the relationship
between competence and a negative event. However, they did not replicate Aronson, Willerman, and Floyd's (1966) findings: in treatments which utilized a high competent stimulus person, the occurrence of a blunder acted to reduce attractiveness. In another study, Kiesler, Weizmann and Pallak (1967) again examined the effect of a negative event in the life of a competent versus incompetent person . . . this time a purported auto crash which killed the stimulus person's fiancée . . . and again demonstrated that under certain conditions (when the accident was not his fault) that perceived competence and a negative event result in increased attractiveness for the competent person. For the incompetent person who had an accident not his fault, his attractiveness decreased. Since most of the above studies show an interaction effect, this author assumed that a negative self-disclosure would serve the same function as did the blunder for perceived competent and incompetent disclosers; that is, a negative self-disclosure from a competent source would interact with the perceived competence-incompetence.

**Feeling-Failure Message Variables**

In addition to the competence-incompetence of the discloser, the present study focused on one additional variable, that of the message and the possible effects that a disclosure of incompetence had on the attractiveness of
the discloser. Cozby (1973) and Dies and Cohen (1976) emphasized the need for more research on the specific content of the message. Most of the studies listed earlier which focus on the message have been concerned about the degree of intimacy or the valence. Since disclosure theorists have increasingly indicated that self-disclosure as a multidimensional construct is exceedingly complex, is it possible that certain kinds of negative self-disclosure are more appropriate . . . or result in more attraction . . . than other similar forms of negative self-disclosure? Again, part of the reason for the conflicting findings in the literature may be caused by subtle but important variables which are yet not understood. For example, one of the ongoing debates in the counseling-psychotherapy literature is whether or not the counselor or therapist should disclose. One can find support for either position (Weiner, 1978). In light of the multidimensional aspect of self-disclosure, it should be apparent that the question, "Should a counselor disclose to his/her clients?" is really not a very useful or thoughtful question; rather, there are several questions such as when, how, to whom, how much, and what kind.

The literature does not say much regarding disclosure messages of incompetence. One study that indirectly addresses the issue of incompetence is that of Dies and Cohen (1976). They asked subjects to rate 65 disclosure statements attributed to therapists or counselors of
encounter or therapy groups on the basis of how helpful the subjects thought it would be for the leaders to disclose these things at various stages in the group process. Of the 65 statements, those which were judged least helpful for the leaders to disclose were the following:

1. Feelings of sexual attraction toward a member of the group
2. Questions about his/her own emotional stability
3. Feelings about anxiety or uncertainty about leadership
4. The fact that he/she is currently in therapy for personal problems
5. Feelings of prejudice toward particular members in the group
6. The fear that the group will fail
7. Feelings that what the members are doing is ridiculous
8. Past failure experiences as a group leader
9. Boredom with the group process
10. Feelings of being inferior to other members in the group

In contrast, here are the ten items judged most helpful for disclosure by the therapist:

1. Whether or not he/she is able to let himself go when he/she gets angry
2. Whether or not he/she ever cried as an adult
when he/she was sad

3. Professional goals

4. One of the worst things that ever happened to him/her

5. Feelings about how much independence he/she needs

6. The admission that he/she has many conflicts which are similar to those of the group

7. The kinds of things that make him/her especially proud of himself/herself

8. Times when he/she has felt lonely

9. Times when he/she has felt helpless

10. The kind of person he/she would like to be

Dies and Cohen (1976) conclude by saying

The composite results of the content analyses suggest a reasonably coherent picture. Subjects indicated a preference for a leader who is confident of his leadership abilities and in his own emotional stability and who is willing to share his positive strivings (personal and professional goals) and normal emotional experiences (e.g., loneliness, sadness, anger, worries, and anxieties). On the other hand, subjects expressed reservations about the appropriateness of a group leader's confrontation of individual members, especially early in the group sessions, with such negative feelings as distrust, anger, and the disdain and criticism of the group experience by admitting feelings of frustration, boredom, or isolation.

p. 85 [emphasis mine]

It is probably safe to assume that most group leaders are expected to have more competence in group leadership skills than do the members of the group, and that they should be reasonably mature and well-balanced emotionally.
Thus, if the leader's disclosures reveal incompetence in areas deemed important to the group members, he/she will be less accepted than if he/she discloses only about issues not related to competence as a group leader or person—areas and feelings which all of the members share, e.g., times when he/she has felt proud, helpless, lonely, or sad.

By the same token, if the therapist or counselor had made the identical disclosures at an earlier stage in his/her career (perhaps in a group of fellow therapist-trainees) this honesty may have been more acceptable—and even applauded—since he/she was regarded as a learner and was expected to be wrestling with this kind of problem or feeling. Once again, it is obvious that self-disclosure is a complex phenomenon, dependent on a number of factors for its acceptability, one of which could be the incompetence content of the message.

The author contends that in our society, it is more acceptable to disclose feelings than failures, that is, it is more acceptable to disclose a feeling or fear of failure than to disclose actual failure itself. This belief was tested in a predissertation pilot study using a prototype of the disclosure messages found in Appendices D and E. The messages are a purported disclosure from a student teacher who is having a difficult time in the classroom. They are almost identical, except that in the one treatment, the discloser is telling of his feelings and fears of failure,
whereas in the other treatment, he says the same things, except that he couches it in terms of actual failure. For example, compare "When I have a confrontation, I sometimes feel like embarrassing the student right in front of his classmates" with "When I have a confrontation, I sometimes embarrass the student right in front of his classmates."

Three undergraduate education classes (total N = 53) heard one or the other of two prototype tapes and were asked to rate the discloser in terms of 20 pairs of bipolar adjectives using a semantic differential. (Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957) There were significant differences between ratings for the discloser of negative feelings versus ratings for the discloser of failure or incompetence in most of the bipolar pairs (see Appendix F). Thus, the author was led to hypothesize that disclosers who share negative feelings will be more attractive than disclosers who share failures.
CHAPTER III
METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Design and Analysis

A completely randomized factorial design was used for the data analysis (Kirk, 1968). The data of interest were the combined score on the last two items on the Interpersonal Judgment Scale; this was gathered from undergraduate teacher education students in educational psychology, physical education, and home economics education. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of two treatment groups for each class. Each subject participated in only one treatment interaction. The analysis was performed using analysis of variance (ANOVA) for both treatment groups (main effects) and also for the treatment combination (interaction effects). See Figure 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competent</td>
<td>N = 15</td>
<td>N = 15</td>
<td>N = 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incompetent</td>
<td>N = 15</td>
<td>N = 15</td>
<td>N = 15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Treatment cells
For the analysis, each of the treatment cells consisted of randomly selected subjects from at least two different classes and sometimes three. This was done to avoid the possible confounding effect of error variance resulting from each educational area functioning as an N of 1 (e.g., physical education majors versus home economics majors).

**Subjects**

Subjects consisted of 90 undergraduates enrolled in teacher education courses in either educational psychology, home economics education, or physical education. Forty-two males and forty-eight females participated in this study in partial fulfillment of the research requirement for their courses. Subjects were debriefed following the complete collection of data.

**Instrument**

The scale that was used to measure interpersonal attraction was the Interpersonal Judgment Scale by Byrne (see Appendix G). This instrument is a six item scale developed specifically to measure interpersonal attraction or liking. The questions deal with the subject's evaluation on a seven point scale of the stimulus person's intelligence, morality, knowledge of current events, adjustment, likeableness, and desirability as a future work partner. Since the first four items are fillers, only the last two items are those of interest:
I FEEL THAT I WOULD LIKE THIS PERSON

Very little  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Very much

I FEEL THAT I WOULD ENJOY WORKING ON A CLASS PROJECT WITH THIS PERSON

Very little  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  Very much

A number of researchers have found that these items are an excellent overall measure of interpersonal attractiveness (Allgeier & Byrne, 1973; Byrne & Clor, 1966; Byrne, Ervin, & Lamberth, 1970; Byrne & Griffitt, 1966; Byrne, Griffitt, Hudgins, & Reeves, 1969; Byrne & Nelson, 1965; Byrne, London, & Reeves, 1968; McWhirter, 1969; Effran, 1969; Mahone, 1977). The total range for the last two items is from two (the lowest attractive rating) to 14 (the highest).

Two reliability checks using split-half procedures measured .85 (Byrne & Nelson, 1965) and .86 (McWhirter, 1969). Several tests of the items' construct validity were carried out. Allgeier and Byrne (1973) found a significant relationship between the Interpersonal Judgment Scale and both interpersonal spatial distance and similarity of attitude. Byrne, Ervin, and Lamberth (1970) found a similar relationship between physical proximity of dating individuals and scores on the Interpersonal Judgment Scale. Effran (1969) found that the Interpersonal Judgment Scale items closely correlated to the amount of visual contact observed in a later meeting.
Method

Independent Variables

With respect to the competence-incompetence status of the discloser, the subjects heard one of two introductions of the discloser (see Appendices A and B). In both conditions, the setting and background descriptions were identical. The author introduced himself, described the study as one in interpersonal impression formation, and told that the tape excerpts which the subjects were about to hear were condensed and patched together from a 90 minute session which occurred during the fifth week of the speaker's student teaching. The meeting was supposedly a weekly seminar consisting of five other student teachers and the university advisor who met to discuss and share any aspects of the participants' student teaching which they wished to share. At this point, the descriptions differed for the two conditions: one was in competent terms as related to professional goals and progress, and the other was described in incompetent terms. In Condition 1, the young man was described as having had a highly successful first year of teaching and being currently engaged in an equally successful second year teaching honors classes, advising the student council, and enrolled in a masters program at the University of Texas. In Condition 2, he was described as a young man who had problems in his first year of teaching, dropped out before Christmas, and was now moving from job to job.
For the other independent variable of disclosure message, a graduate student public school teacher with experience in oral interpretation prepared three tapes with the different disclosure levels: non-disclosure, failure-incompetence disclosure, and feeling disclosure. In the non-disclosure condition (see Appendix C), the stimulus person spoke almost entirely of factual or demographic information regarding his student teaching experience. In the incompetence disclosure condition (see Appendix D), he used the same factual information but also expressed his failures as a student teacher. In the feeling disclosure condition (see Appendix E), he shared the same information given in the non-disclosure condition and the same types of disclosure made in Condition 2, but instead of sharing in failure terms, he described feelings of frustration and fear of possible failure.

Feedback from subjects hearing the pilot tapes indicated that the background was too quiet for a purported group meeting. Also, some subjects felt it was unlikely that a person would disclose at such length without interruption. Based on these suggestions, the final tapes were made in an actual group setting where ambient sounds (coughing, foot shuffling, chairs squeaking, and the like) added to the realism. Also, several breaks were made during recording so that volume or distance of the speaker from the microphone could be changed to simulate excerpting and
patching from a longer session.

Procedural checks

A pilot check was done on the feeling versus failure disclosure variable to ascertain that subjects perceived a significant difference between the two conditions. The two discloser introductions were rated on a bipolar semantic differential scale (Osgood, Suci & Tannenbaum, 1957) with the item of interest being competent-incompetent (see Appendix F).

Procedure

Subjects were available by classes. Each class was randomly divided into two groups, with one part remaining in the classroom and the other part adjourning to a nearby empty classroom. Experimental treatment was conducted by the author and another doctoral student with consistent instructions.

Subjects in Cell 1 listened to the tape of the competent stimulus person disclosing a neutral message. In Cell 2, subjects heard the same introduction coupled with the negative behavior (failure) disclosure. In Cell 3, subjects again heard the competent introduction but in this case, it was coupled with the negative feeling disclosure.

In Cell 4, subjects heard the introduction of the incompetent discloser and listened to a neutral message. In Cell 5, subjects again heard the incompetent discloser
introduction which this time was followed by the negative behavior (failure) disclosure message. In Cell 6, subjects listened to the introduction of incompetence, followed by disclosure of negative feelings (see Figure 3).

Instructions and Debriefing

Subjects were told that this research was on the nature of interpersonal impression formation. They were asked to listen carefully to the tape, and then immediately following it, to respond to the Interpersonal Judgment Scale. Following the collection of all data, subjects were debriefed, by either written feedback, oral feedback, or both. No subjects indicated that they suspected the true nature of the research or guessed the hypotheses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cell 1</th>
<th>Cell 2</th>
<th>Cell 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subjects heard competent stimulus person disclosing a neutral message</td>
<td>Subjects heard competent stimulus person disclosing a failure message</td>
<td>Subjects heard competent stimulus person disclosing a negative feeling message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cell 4</td>
<td>Cell 5</td>
<td>Cell 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjects heard incompetent stimulus person disclosing a neutral message</td>
<td>Subjects heard incompetent stimulus person disclosing a failure message</td>
<td>Subjects heard incompetent stimulus person disclosing a negative feeling message</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3. Experimental Treatment in Each Cell
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

It was hypothesized that subjects would rate competent disclosers significantly higher than they would incompetent disclosers; that disclosers who shared a negative feeling message would be rated significantly higher than disclosers who shared a negative failure message; that there would be no significant interaction between the variables of the perceived competence-incompetence of the discloser with the conditions of non-disclosure, negative feeling disclosure, and failure disclosure. However, it was hypothesized that there would be a significant interaction between the perceived competence-incompetence of the discloser and any of the negative self disclosures (feeling, failure, or a combination of the two), resulting in significantly higher ratings for the perceived competent discloser and significantly lower ratings for the perceived incompetent discloser when compared to the non-disclosure baseline.

The dependent variable for measuring interpersonal attraction was the sum of the last two items on Byrne's Interpersonal Judgment Scale (IJS).

The major analysis of data utilized a 2 x 3 factorial analysis of variance with competence-incompetence of the discloser and the three types of disclosure messages (non-disclosure, negative failing, and negative feeling) as the independent variables (Kirk, 1968).
The means and standard deviations for the six experimental conditions are shown in Table 2, and the means are graphed in Figure 4. The source for the Anova attractiveness rating appears in Table 3.

Analysis of the data reveals that a perceived competent discloser was rated significantly more attractive than a perceived incompetent discloser, $F(1, 84) = 5.889$, $p < .02$ (see Table 3), thus confirming the first hypothesis. The competent discloser received a mean rating of 8.89 as compared to a mean rating of 7.51 for the incompetent discloser (see Table 2).

The main effect of the disclosure message itself, as hypothesized, reveals that disclosers of a negative feeling message were rated significantly higher than disclosers of a comparable negative failure message, $F(2, 84) = 17.693$, $p < .001$. The means for the conditions of non-disclosure, failure disclosure, and feeling disclosure were 9.70, 5.90, and 9.00 respectively. Subsequently, Duncan's Multiple Range Test ($\alpha = .05$) was used to analyze the difference in the data for disclosure messages; results indicated that the failure disclosure was rated significantly lower than either the feeling and non-disclosure conditions. Also, there was no significant difference between the non-disclosure condition and the feeling disclosure condition.

Analysis of the means graphed in Figure 4 indicated no interaction of the competence-incompetence with the feeling
**TABLE 2**

MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR ATTRACTION RATINGS:
ALL POSSIBLE COMBINATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disclosure Message</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Failure</th>
<th>Feeling</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competent</td>
<td>10.53</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>6.40</td>
<td>2.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incompetent</td>
<td>8.87</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>2.26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9.70</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>5.90</td>
<td>2.59</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competent</td>
<td>8.87</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incompetent</td>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>2.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5.90</td>
<td>2.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 3**

SOURCE TABLE FOR THE FACTORIAL ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE:
TOTAL INTERPERSONAL ATTRACTIVENESS MEASURE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence-incompetence (A)</td>
<td>41.344</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>41.344</td>
<td>5.889*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosure message (B)</td>
<td>248.422</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>124.211</td>
<td>17.693**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A x B</td>
<td>1.489</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.744</td>
<td>&lt; 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within cell</td>
<td>589.726</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>7.021</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>880.981</td>
<td>89</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p < .001
* p < .05
Figure 4. Mean Attractiveness Ratings of Competent-Incompetent Disclosers Under Three Disclosure Message Conditions
versus the failure disclosure. A precautionary check was done by dropping the non-disclosure condition and running and 2 x 2 ANOVA to ascertain that no interaction had taken place. Results were non-significant, F (1, 56) = <1. Thus, analysis of the data failed to reject the third hypothesis, presented in the null form, that there would be no interaction between competence-incompetence and a feeling-failure message.

In analyzing the final hypothesis that either of the negative disclosures or a combination of both of them would interact with the perceived competence-incompetence of the discloser, the two negative disclosure treatments (failure and feeling) were analyzed separately (See Table 3) and also were combined into a single negative self disclosure condition for analysis, F (1, 86) = <1. None of the findings approached significance.

A post hoc analysis of the data was done to determine if either of the last two items on the Interpersonal Judgment Scale taken separately as the dependent variable would reveal a difference in the main effects or show the hypothesized interaction between the status of the discloser and a negative disclosure. As was found in the total score (items 5 and 6 together), the results for the liking item alone and for the desire to work with the discloser on a project both showed significant main effects and no significant interaction between negative disclosure and the status of the discloser. See Tables 4 and 5.
### TABLE 4

SOURCE TABLE FOR THE FACTORIAL ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE:
LIKING—INTERPERSONAL ATTRACTIVENESS MEASURE
(ITEM 5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>SS</th>
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<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence-incompetence (A)</td>
<td>8.100</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.100</td>
<td>4.468*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosure message (B)</td>
<td>32.067</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.033</td>
<td>8.845**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A x B</td>
<td>.467</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.233</td>
<td>&lt; 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within cell</td>
<td>152.266</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>1.813</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>192.900</td>
<td>89</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**P < .001
*P < .05

### TABLE 5

SOURCE TABLE FOR THE FACTORIAL ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE:
FUTURE INTERACTIONS—INTERPERSONAL ATTRACTIVENESS MEASURE
(ITEM 6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
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<th>DF</th>
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<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence-incompetence (A)</td>
<td>12.100</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.100</td>
<td>5.815*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disclosure message (B)</td>
<td>106.022</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>53.011</td>
<td>25.475**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A x B</td>
<td>.867</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.433</td>
<td>&lt; 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within cell</td>
<td>174.798</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>2.081</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>293.786</td>
<td>89</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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</table>

**P < .001
*P < .05
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Major Findings

An important finding in this study is that disclosers who discussed failure in areas in which they were expected to succeed were definitely less attractive to subjects than were those who disclosed fears of failure or feelings of frustration in those areas, but not actual failure. Although the study by Dies and Cohen (1976) did not deal with liking, per se, those authors found that certain kinds of disclosures made by therapists or counselors were regarded as much more helpful by clients than other kinds. Their conclusion was that the disclosure of normal or common feelings is more acceptable than the disclosure of ineptness or weakness in group management or in relating to group members. Indirectly, then, the results of their study relate to this study, even though in the present study, subjects rated a stimulus object (an alleged student teacher) who was presumably a peer and not in a superior role. If one defines appropriate disclosure as that which results in increased attraction and desire to relate to the discloser, then one can conclude that failure disclosure is less appropriate than feeling disclosure and may account for the way that therapists and counselors were rated in the Dies and Cohen study.
Even though the present study clearly demonstrates that subjects preferred disclosers who shared in terms of feeling rather than failure, the author found prior to doing the actual treatments for the dissertation that colleagues and professors who compared the two tapes without knowing the hypothesis inevitably failed to recognize or verbalize the differences between them. Almost without exception, the listeners sensed that there was a difference but often phrased such differences in terms of personal characteristics, e.g., more honest or more depressed or less concerned, depending on their particular focus. None mentioned likable or competent. However, when the semantic differential scores were compared on the pilot study and the liking scores for the actual treatment, the results showed unequivocally that the subjects responded to the subtle difference which they sensed. Two related studies would be worthwhile to pursue. The first would be to analyze the semantic differential data to determine where most of the variance from the pilot study lies (see Appendix F). This could be done using a step-wise regression technique. The other study would be to prepare a factual recall check on the specific information disclosed and see if the recollection of certain specific facts or certain amounts of information correlates with attraction. This should also be done with the content of the competence-incompetence introductions. It is possible that certain kinds of disclosures or certain demographic
facts account for most of the variance.

Another finding of this study is that people who are competent in their professions are better liked than incompetent people, as rated on the Interpersonal Judgment Scale. These results seemed likely, given the earlier findings of Spence and Helmreich (1972), Jellison and Davis (1973), Helmreich, et al. (1970), Aronson, et al. (1966), Iverson (1964), Stotland and Dunn (1964), Stotland and Hillmer (1962, and Teague (1973).

The third finding is that a personal, negative self-disclosure does not interact with the perceived competence or incompetence of the discloser to enhance the attractiveness of the competent person. Negative failure disclosure led to significantly decreased attractiveness for both the competent and incompetent discloser when compared to a non-discloser. Thus, the disclosure failed to lead, as hypothesized, to increased attractiveness for the competent discloser. Actually, a negative feeling disclosure and a non-disclosure were judged equally for both competent and incompetent disclosers.

One possible reason for the failure of this study to replicate Aronson's et al. (1966) is that equating a blunder of spilling coffee on one's suit with career related incompetence or fear of failure may be trying to compare differences of kind rather than degree. Had the discloser's message been concerned with non-career related blunders,
such as locking one's keys in the car or dropping one's tray in the cafeteria, the interaction effect might have occurred. Perhaps this difference in disclosing might be illustrated by a teacher disclosing to his/her peers a tendency to awkwardly drop test or term papers on the floor as he/she prepares to hand them back to the students versus disclosing a tendency to lose test or term papers before they are graded or returned. The former might be regarded as endearing, or at least tolerable for a perceived competent teacher; the latter, being intrinsically related to one's professional duties, would most likely result in decreased attraction.

Another difference between this study and Aronson's which may help explain the absence of the hypothesized interaction is that in the pratfall situation, only one event occurred—the spilling of the coffee. In this study, on the other hand, the discloser catalogues a list of several failures or frustrations, as compared to Aronson's one. It is likely that, if Aronson's stimulus person had committed several faux pas, his attractiveness rating would have suffered a significant setback under any condition. An interesting follow-up study would be to vary the number of negative self-disclosures to see if limited negative disclosure might prove to be attractive, while at the same time looking for the point at which increasing numbers of disclosures would cause a diminished attraction.
As far as failing to support the interaction hypothesis, one of the pilot studies conducted by the author provided an intimation that such might occur. The pilot was conducted with the five separate components of the study (the competent and incompetent introductions and the three different messages) to determine, first of all, if the difference in the descriptions were powerful enough to be reflected in the rating scores, and second, to see if the three messages resulted in different responses. First year education students, to fulfill part of a research component in their courses, separately rated one of the messages and then one of the introductions, in that order. The two parts were not combined at this point in the study as they were later but were rated discretely: the disclosure message was described as having come from a student teacher, and the competence-incompetence introduction as being a description of a second year teacher.

The author plotted the following means from the pilot:
Thus, although it was not possible to compute an interaction effect at this point, the additive effect, as it turns out, was a good predictor of what actually occurred in the main study (Anderson, 1962).

Methodological Considerations
Although the subjects in this study probably represent a good cross section of college students preparing for a career in teaching, the author is aware that these findings cannot be generalized with certainty to all college students or to all adults everywhere. It is possible, for
example, that college students would be more attracted to the stimulus person depicted as being highly successful in his profession than would a non-college sampling of subjects. Also, it is difficult to know whether the fact that most of the subjects were West Texas residents affected their responses to male negative self-disclosure as compared to subjects from the Northeast or West Coast, for example. Perhaps any self-disclosure by males is less acceptable in certain parts of the country than in other parts.

Another limitation is that the study is dealing only with reactions to a single, initial disclosure, even though the narrator indicated that the tape was made during the fifth session of the group's meeting. Therefore, even though the study is addressing the issue of self-disclosure, it more accurately deals with initial self-disclosure of a stranger to the subjects; their reactions to such disclosure might have been quite different had they heard the stimulus person speak before, even if the topics were relatively trivial or non-intimate. Also, if they had been rating their friends or acquaintances who had disclosed an identical message, it is likely that those results would have been different also.

Related to this is the phenomenon of non-involvement or non-interaction of the subjects with the discloser. Regardless of how realistic the tape sounds, listening to a purported session is not the same as being an involved
participant in the group. Perhaps an important component is lost in hearing a disembodied voice . . . or even seeing an image on a screen . . . which changes one's reactions to what one hears or sees in a basic or profound way. Many phenomenologists or Gestaltists would affirm that listening to the tape is in no way analogous to participating in an ongoing group experience. Thus, as in virtually all experimental studies, generalizability is reduced in order to gain control. Whether or not the controls nullify the usefulness of the results will continue to be debatable.

Another limitation of this study is that findings based on disclosing in a purported group setting may not necessarily apply to disclosure in a dyadic relationship. It is conceivable, and perhaps likely, that subjects reacted to the disclosure supposedly made to a group of five students and a university advisor in a somewhat different manner than they would have if it had been made to one other person or to them individually (Jones and Archer, 1976).

Next, in order to control for extraneous variables and in replication of Aronson's study, only a male stimulus person was used. It is possible that subjects would have responded differently to a female disclosing in the three different conditions or would have responded differently to the competence-incompetence condition. Thus, one must use caution in applying the findings of this study to female disclosers because of the possible confounding of sex role differences.
Finally, the study would have been strengthened if there had been a behavioral measurement of liking in addition to the Interpersonal Judgment Scale. After hearing the tapes, subjects could have been given the option of signing up for an in-class alternative activity in which they would supposedly interact with the stimulus person on a topic relating to student teaching or teaching in the public schools.

**Implications of the Findings**

Even considering the limitations, there are several implications of the finding that feeling disclosure is regarded more favorably than is failure disclosure. Group counselors, teachers in expressive types of classrooms, supervisors and administrators, and anyone interested in information management techniques may be able to find in the results a clue to more effectively helping their clients, students, subordinates, or themselves to disclose more appropriately among their peers. This is not, of course, assuming that there are certain kinds of disclosure which are even inappropriate in the privacy of a professional's office; rather, it is directed to the type of disclosure made to the untrained recipient or target. Thus a school counselor, for example, may privately caution the eighteen year old young man in his counseling group that in front of his peers it is better for him to disclose that he feels extremely upset when he can't have his way, but disclosing
that he cries and has tantrums should be reserved for the privacy of the counselor's office.

Implications exist for counselors themselves. Numerous articles and studies have appeared which deal with whether or not a counselor should disclose to his/her clients or counselors (Weiner, 1978). Counselors who value genuine-ness and transparency in the counseling and interpersonal relationships may still ponder whether they wish to disclose to the group or client in terms of feelings (e.g., I never start a new group without feeling butterflies and wondering how well we are going to relate to each other) versus negative events (e.g., I never start a new group without feeling butterflies from wondering whether some of the bad experiences I have had with other groups will occur with this group). The same could apply to a teacher disclosing to his/her students or fellow teachers.

Of original interest to the author were the ramifications of possible findings as they may relate to the non-obviously stigmatized individuals (those who have a negatively valued characteristic which is not apparent to an outsider unless he/she was informed of it, e.g., epilepsy, a history of psychiatric care, enuresis) and the reactions of the unaware to such disclosure. If the final hypothesis had been confirmed, it could have offered potential help to epileptics, for example, as to whether to disclose their stigma or not. The captain of the football team or the head
cheerleader might have benefited from such disclosure, whereas the isolated student in the health class discussion group would probably have been less likely to gain from such disclosure.

Nevertheless, there may still be some disclosure implications in this study for the non-obviously stigmatized. For example, if stigmatized people in our society are consciously or subconsciously regarded by others as being failures because of their imperfections, they might wish to proceed cautiously in disclosing their "failure" (stigma) to a group of their peers since it would likely result in decreased attraction. Thus, it is likely that a normal appearing and acting tenth grader would stand to lose in attractiveness by telling his peers in a health class discussion group that he feels ashamed of the fact that at his age he still wets the bed. A skilled teacher would attempt to help his/her students distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate disclosure among peers and encourage them to talk in terms of feelings—feeling discouraged or depressed when he/she has a weakness that seems impossible to overcome. Most young people would probably be able to handle this kind of message and identify with the struggle.

Counselors and teachers who seek to promote openness and self-disclosure might be advised to provide examples of appropriate versus inappropriate disclosure to their counselors and students through handouts or prepared tape
excerpts. Another possible strategy is to arrange disclosures in such a way as to insure anonymity through techniques such as secret sharing, in which each person writes about something troubling him/her and after the "secrets" are shuffled and redistributed, each person reads the anonymous note on the paper he/she has drawn and then tries to describe how it must feel to have a secret like that. This technique combines the advantage of sharing a troublesome fact or feeling without subjecting oneself to possible negative repercussions. Certainly, the teacher and counselors would feel responsible to help any clients whose open disclosures were apparently resulting in alienation of the other group members from them.

In this study, findings clearly indicate that feeling disclosure does not lower attraction, even for the competent. An interesting question remains as to whether an honest disclosure of feelings alone ever constitutes incompetence. In other words, does even the admission of fear or frustration result in reduced attraction for the discloser? Again, the author suspects that such a disclosure results in decreased attraction when the feelings relate to possible incompetence in an area in which the person is expected by society to perform competently. For example, brain surgeons or airline pilots who admit they feel tense in crucial situations may be expressing very honest feelings but may also be damaging their credibility—and attractive-
ness—among superiors, peers, and subordinates, as well as among those whose lives depend upon their ability to remain calm in crises. In this particular study, it would be interesting to see how subjects would respond to the feeling message had it been attributed to a fifth year teacher rather than to a student teacher. Perhaps admitting such feelings and frustrations from an experienced teacher would be unacceptable to many subjects. Such a study would be an interesting follow up on the present study.

Summary

In summary, the findings of this study indicate support for three of the four hypotheses formulated in Chapter II. First, competent disclosers were liked significantly more than incompetent disclosers as rated on the Interpersonal Judgment Scale. Second, disclosers who discussed in terms of feelings, doubts, or frustrations were liked significantly more than were disclosers who confessed to incompetence and failure in their professional performance. Third, as hypothesized, there was no interaction between the perceived competence-incompetence of the discloser and the two negative disclosure messages. In other words, it did not make any difference if a competent or incompetent discloser phrased the message in feeling or in failure terms: the main effects accounted for the variance. Finally, the hypothesis that the perceived competence of the discloser would interact with the negative disclosure message
(either failure or feeling) to result in increased attraction for the incompetent discloser was not confirmed. Disclosing in negative terms did result in decreased attraction for the perceived incompetent stimulus person, as hypothesized; but failure disclosure for the perceived competent person also resulted in diminished attractiveness. On the other hand, there was not significant difference for the perceived competent discloser between the feeling disclosure and non-disclosure treatments.

Suggestions for Future Research

In addition to those mentioned earlier, several other related possibilities exist for future study. One would be to study the effect that a positive self-disclosure has on attraction as compared with non-disclosure or negative disclosure and the perceived competence of the discloser. The literature deals with the effects of positive and negative self-disclosure (disclosure valence) but not as it relates to the discloser's perceived competence (Lynn, 1977; Hoffman & Spencer, 1977; Gilbert & Horenstein, 1975; Dies & Cohen, 1976; Bienvenu, 1970, Levinger & Senn, 1967; Blau, 1964). One might expect to find that a positive disclosure would be more congruent coming from a perceived competent source than from an incompetent source.

Another possible direction for further investigation would be to focus on personality variables of the recipient.
What characteristics of the person who hears the disclosure affect the way in which he/she responds to the discloser and the message? In a follow up study to the original pratfall research, Helmreich, Aronson, and LeFan (1970) used a similar setting and approach but first tested the subjects' self esteem. They found a significant interaction between a subject's self esteem and liking for the blunderer. People with average self esteem liked the competent person who blundered, whereas subjects of high and low esteem reported a loss of attraction for the competent person who blundered. In the incompetent condition, the committing of a blunder affected attraction very little for any of the subjects, regardless of their self esteem. Mettee and Welkines (1972) also determined that interaction occurred among subjects of various self esteem, the competence of the stimulus persons, and the presence or absence of a negative happening. They found that competent subjects reported reduced attraction for competent stimuli persons who blundered, whereas average subjects reported no such reduction in attraction. On the other hand, average subjects downgraded average people who blundered but not superior people. These studies indicate that the personality characteristics of the subjects would be a worthwhile variable to investigate.

A discloser may find a very different reception in disclosing to someone who views himself/herself more or less competent than the discloser.
An additional study focusing on the target variable would be whether or not males would respond differently to competent versus incompetent disclosers and to various kinds of disclosure messages than would females. To date, no consistent sex differences have been reported with regard to target variables. Also of interest would be whether competent males are liked more than competent females and whether incompetent males are liked more than incompetent females. Finally, would any sex difference occur with regard to males versus females disclosing in a feeling or in a failure mode?

[Another possible study with potential import for counselors and counselor educators would be to use the same independent variables of competence-incompetence of the discloser and the three different message levels but examine the effect of the setting by varying it; for example, instead of occurring in a student teaching seminar, describe it as occurring in a personal enrichment group versus a therapy group. Perhaps attraction varies according to the perceived appropriateness of the setting in which one discloses.]
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APPENDICES

A. Treatment 1, Condition A
B. Treatment 1, Condition B
C. Treatment 2, Condition A
D. Treatment 2, Condition B
E. Treatment 2, Condition C
F. T test Results for Pilot Semantic Differential
G. Interpersonal Judgment Scale
APPENDIX A

Treatment 1
Condition A

This is Richard Stevick. I am an instructor here at Tech and am currently in charge of a major research project focusing on the nature of interpersonal impression formation. In a moment, you will hear an excerpt from a tape made two years ago during a weekly meeting of six student teachers and their university advisor. The purpose of this seminar was to discuss any aspect of their student teaching experience which they wanted to share with each other and their advisor. All of the participants freely gave their permission to use this tape for the study. A word of background on the first person you will be hearing on the tape:

He graduated from high school in San Marcos, Texas, and attended Southwest Texas State for a year before transferring to Tech. He did his student teaching in the Lubbock area. After graduating from Tech, he obtained a position with the Austin Independent School District as a biology teacher. Follow-up information from his department chairperson indicated that at the end of his first year, he was recognized as the outstanding new teacher in his high school. Now in his second year in the same school, he is currently teaching the honors biology course and all of the chemistry sections. In extra curricular areas, he sponsors the science
club and is in his first year as faculty advisor to the student council. Professionally, he is a member of the TSTA and NEA. He plans to continue teaching and indicates that he will begin work this summer on his masters at the University of Texas.

In the interest of time, I have compressed an hour and one half session into this twenty minute tape by omitting irrelevant material and splicing together the more typical and pertinent discussions. The participants' names have also been deleted.

(At this point, there is a short break on the tape, and then it comes in on the purported student teaching seminar.)

Advisor: "Okay, who's next?" (Small pause) "(Blip), you look like you have some things you want to share with us."

(Then comes one of the three disclosures for Treatment 2)
APPENDIX B

Treatment 1
Condition B

(This paragraph is identical to the introduction in Condition A of Treatment 1; the next paragraph is the varying of the introduction to present the incompetent dis­closer).

He graduated from high school in San Marcos, Texas, and attended Southwest Texas State University for a year before transferring to Tech. He did his student teaching in the Lubbock area. After graduating from Tech, he ob­tained a position in the Austin area as a biology teacher. Follow-up information from his department chairperson in­dicated that in early October he was transferred into the eighth grade general science program in an effort to find the best fit for him. He continued there until the Thanks­giving break, at which time he is reported to have resigned his position. After leaving teaching, he took employment in Austin with the Kresge Corporation as a building materials salesperson in a large K Mart store there. Current follow­up reports indicate that earlier this year he was enrolled in the Austin Barber College but dropped out for undisclosed reasons. The placement office lost contact with him at that point.

(Then the narrative continues identically to the first condition.)
APPENDIX C

Treatment 2
Condition A

I think you all know that I'm a secondary ed major, and one of my teaching fields is biology. My cooperating teacher is in his sixth year of teaching and is really pretty good. He's given me one new section each week, and now I've got all five classes. His approach with me is to pretty much leave me on my own—to work things out for myself. That's good or bad, depending. It's good in that I'm forced to learn to solve my own problems. But it's not so good when things go wrong.

We use the textbook Modern Biology. I think it has a really decent approach to the subject. We used it when I was in high school. I have two preparations with my five classes. All of the honors students have a two hour lab each week, and I'm supposed to make up and give them one test a week. Mr. Evans told me to give both a quiz and a test each week to the regular sections.

There are three other student teachers in the school and one of the biggest topics of conversation seems to be discipline. You know, I personally think it would be good for education professors to get back into the public school classroom every so often to keep in touch. I know myself that even though I've only been out of high school three years, I had sort of forgotten what it's like and how young the students seem.
Besides my student teaching, I'm taking one ed course this semester. Last week we talked about what characteristics a person needs to be a good teacher and why people go into it in the first place. I'm sure of one thing: it's not for the money.
APPENDIX D

Treatment 2
Condition B

I think you all know that I'm a secondary ed major, and one of my teaching fields is biology. My cooperating teacher is in his sixth year of teaching and is really pretty good. He's given me one new section each week, and now I've got all five classes. His approach with me is to pretty much leave me on my own—to work things out for myself. That's good or bad, depending. It's good in that I'm forced to learn to solve my own problems. But it's not so good when things go wrong. In my situation, my classes are so boring that I have kids falling asleep on me. That is when it's not too noisy to sleep. The department chairperson has already talked to my cooperating teacher about what he calls the rowdiness of my students.

It's certainly not the fault of the materials we use. We use the textbook *Modern Biology*. I think it has a really decent approach to the subject. We used it when I was in high school. You know, when I see how much I don't know, I realize that I should have studied much harder in college. One of my problems is that I'm not very well prepared when I come to class. I stay about a page and a half ahead of the students.

I have two preparations with my five classes. All of the honors students have a two hour lab each week, and I'm supposed to make up and give them one test a week. Mr.
Evans told me to give both a quiz and a test each week to the regular sections. Right now, it wouldn't surprise me if half my students are failing. One of my problems is that I don't get papers corrected, grades recorded, or tests back quickly. Students complain that they don't know where they stand in the course.

There are three other student teachers in the school, and one of the biggest topics of conversation seems to be discipline. I hate to say it, but when I have a showdown with a student, I find myself embarrassing him or her in front of the others. Or at times, I'll threaten students . . . "If you say that again, you're going to go to the office!" Then I don't follow through. And then, if I don't know something, I won't admit to the students that I don't know. Pretty grim, right?

You know, I personally think it would be good for education professors to get back into the public school classroom every so often to keep in touch. I know myself that even though I've only been out of high school three years, I had sort of forgotten what it's like and how young the students seem. And yet . . . and this is really crazy . . . I sometimes find myself openly competing with high school guys to impress the girls. And then at other times I find myself playing favorites with the popular or bright students.
Besides my student teaching, I'm taking one ed
course this semester. Last week we talked about what char-
acteristics a person needs to be a good teacher and why
people go into it in the first place. I'm sure of one
thing: it's not for the money. When I've had an especially
bad day, I realize that I'm not really cut out for teaching.
I guess I'm going into it because I can't do anything else.
And the thing that hurts is that I've really tried hard.
APPENDIX E

Treatment 2
Condition C

I think you all know that I'm a secondary ed major, and one of my teaching fields is biology. My cooperating teacher is in his sixth year of teaching and is really pretty good. He's given me one new section each week, and now I've got all five classes. His approach with me is to pretty much leave me on my own—to work things out for myself. That's good or bad, depending. It's good in that I'm forced to learn to solve my own problems. But it's not so good when things go wrong. In my situation, I sometimes think my classes are so boring that it's a wonder the kids don't fall asleep. That is, if it's not too noisy to sleep. It's a wonder to me that the department chairperson hasn't already talked to my cooperating teacher about the rowdiness of my students.

It's certainly not the fault of the materials we have. We use the textbook Modern Biology. I think it has a really decent approach to the subject. We used it when I was in high school. You know, when I see how much I need to know, I wonder if studying more in college would have helped me. One of my problems is that I feel I'd like to be better prepared when I come to class. I feel like I keep about a page and a half ahead of the students.
I have two preparations with my five classes. All of the honors students have a two hour lab each week, and I'm supposed to make up and give them one test a week. Mr. Evans told me to give both a quiz and a test each week to the regular sections. Sometimes it surprises me that half my students aren't failing. At times, I find myself tempted not to get papers corrected, grades recorded, or tests back quickly. Students have a right to complain if they don't know where they stand in the course.

There are three other student teachers in the school, and one of the biggest topics of conversation seems to be discipline. I hate to say it, but when I have a showdown with a student, I find myself tempted to embarrass him or her in front of the others. Or at times, I would like to threaten students, "If you do that again, you're going to the office." But then I would be tempted not to follow through.

You know, I personally think it would be good for education professors to get back into the public school classroom every so often to keep in touch. I know myself that even though I've only been out of high school three years, I had sort of forgotten what it's like and how young the students seem. And yet . . . and this is really crazy . . . I find myself wanting to compete with high school guys to impress the girls. And then at other times I find myself wanting to play favorites with the popular or bright students.
Besides my student teaching, I'm taking one ed
course this semester. Last week we talked about what char-
acteristics a person needs to be a good teacher and why
people go into it in the first place. I'm sure of one
thing: it's not for the money. When I've had an especially
bad day, I wonder if I'm really cut out for teaching. Maybe
I'm just going into it because I can't do anything else.
And the thing that hurts is that I'm really trying.
APPENDIX F

Pilot Study: Semantic Differential

Prior to the main treatments done in this study, three undergraduate education classes (N = 53) heard one or the other prototype tapes of either the feeling or failure disclosures. Subjects were asked to react to the discloser in terms of the following 20 pairs of bipolar adjectives. When t-tests were calculated to determine if mean ratings for the two groups (feeling versus failure discloser raters) were the same, only three pairs failed to reject the null hypothesis (*p < .001). The underlined words in each pair received the higher rating for the feeling disclosure group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling disclosure</th>
<th>Failure disclosure</th>
<th>T-scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Good</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>1.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Unpleasant</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Friendly</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Fast</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Dirty</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Beautiful</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Tense</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Small</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Mean1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>2.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>2.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Deep</td>
<td>3.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Cold</td>
<td>3.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Dishonest</td>
<td>4.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Competent</td>
<td>3.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>4.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Cowardly</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>2.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>5.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX G

INTERPERSONAL JUDGMENT SCALE

INTELLIGENCE
Very Low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very high

MORALITY
Very low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very high

KNOWLEDGE OF CURRENT EVENTS
Very small 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very great

ADJUSTMENT
Very poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very good

I FEEL THAT I WOULD LIKE THIS PERSON
Very little 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very much

I FEEL THAT I WOULD ENJOY WORKING IN A CLASS EXPERIMENT WITH THIS PERSON
Very little 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very much