

TOWN STUDY PROJECT 1992

SELF-DISCLOSURE IN CHUUK

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Wrenn & Mencke (1975) define self-disclosure as:

.....allowing others to know one fully by opening up and revealing one's thoughts and innermost feelings. Universally self-disclosure is alive, growing relationships are of necessity characterized by opening up, revealing, and disclosing the self. The depth of disclosure may vary from person to person. Sometimes it involves sharing our deepest emotions and feelings. At other times it is simply letting ourselves show through in the joyous moments of mutually shared projects or experience. But it is axiomatic that to be 'deeply known' or 'deeply understood' one must somehow allow oneself to become transparent to others.

How is this so-called "self-disclosure" applied here in Chuuk? Self-disclosure is a very broad and complicated term. Therefore, our group tried to narrow it down and concentrate more on specific parts of it, which will be the goal we expect to reach or in other words, our hypothesis. Our main goal here is to see whether the Chuukese are less or more self-disclosing.

Expressing one's feelings is not something easy and common in Chuuk. The people of Chuuk have different ways of expressing themselves. One example of how Chuukese portray their feelings is through compositions of songs, especially love songs. In any way, it is very hard for the Chuukese to express themselves.

Wrenn & Mencke, (1975). Being: A Psychology of Self (pp91 & 101): Science Research Association, Inc. U.S.A.

However, there are certain places where they gather in groups and talk. For example, in the old days and also on some islands today, the Chuukese women gather at the river side to wash and share stories. They talk about family problems, sex, problems with themselves, and the most common is gossiping. The men, on the other hand, gather at meeting houses, coffee shops, and exchange stories. Other opportunities where the Chuukese normally express or share their feelings are during clan meetings or special religious gathering.

These meetings are usually held before Christmas and New Year Day, or during the last day of a family funeral. For the young, group counseling and sharing are other means of opening up of one's self to other people. In this paper, we are hoping to understand how Chuukese express themselves besides revealing how they think and feel out in the open. In addition, we are trying to know how self-disclosure applies to the Chuukese people.

In Chuuk, self-disclosure is a different story. The historical known fact in Chuuk is that normally people do not disclose themselves because the culture does not really encourage the young ones to freely have direct confrontation with an older individual. However, this particular aspect of the culture seems to be changing in recent years.

As an attempt to understand the complex world of and the decree to which the Chuukese express their feelings or innermost,

our group set out to interview the Chuukese people at different sites. While it is complex to fully understand why the Chuukese would or would not express their feelings, we hope to at least pose some possible explanations.

Within a family's community, we are concentrating more on how the family members communicate with one another. How open they are with each other, how they go about in expressing themselves and what they consider important.

Moreover, with people who have jobs, we want to know how they come into communication with their co-workers, their bosses, and how they go about in solving the problems that they encounter. As for those who are unemployed, we want to know how they live their lives without having a job, how they solve their personal problems, and who they seek help and advice from. In addition, since religion plays a very important role in Chuukese society, we were interested to find out how open people are with their religious leaders.

### Methodology

#### Subject:

The subjects were one hundred and seventeen Chuukese of different levels of education, age, and occupation. Out of 117 people, there were seventy females and forty seven males. The

subjects' ages range from fifteen to sixty-five and their levels of education range from high school to college graduate. All subjects were asked to fill out the survey sheets on sites that were randomly picked. However, during the interview process we chose to interview only those who had some ideas relevant to our topic.

Materials:

The surveys were administered at five different high schools, the hospital, government offices, at the post office, people's homes, and on the streets. Two types of survey sheets were used in our survey. These survey sheets were written in English and Chuukese, but the answers were written and translated into English. The first one was a "true" and "false" survey. The participants or subjects were given several questions to answer based on how they normally or would express their feelings in certain situations. The second part were open-ended questions which required short answers. We hope that the open-ended questions will help our group determine why the participants answered "true" or "false" to the first section. Most of our findings, then, are based or centered on the survey sheets.

Procedure:

The whole project lasts for about four weeks. During the first week, we surveyed and interviewed people at the hospitals, schools,

government offices, stores, and of course on the street. The average time for the survey was forty minutes.

During the second week, we compiled our data and drafted our preliminary outline. Also, during this week not only did we draft a written outline of our data but we also identified other needed information. Therefore, during the third week we continued surveying and interviewing more people. During the fourth week, we began the actual writing of our project.

## DISCUSSION

### The effect of education in self-disclosure

Education seems to have an effect on some people. Education has made some people of Chuuk more open. For example, when asked if they would speak up when they know they were right, seventy-six percent (76%) of the males and nineteen percent (19%) of the females said they would. On the other hand only twenty-four percent of the males and eighty-one percent of the females said they would not. Overall, ninety-nine percent of the females and ninety-four percent of the males that are educated say that when one is educated, one is likely to become more open. For example, when one is educated, one learns to be assertive. Therefore, when one is assertive, one is also open about his feelings. (Refer to the charts at the back.)

Self-disclosure also depends on the individual. The individual's actions and words portray one's personality. If a person is shy, then he or she is most likely to be less self-disclosing. On the other hand, if the person is outgoing, then he or she will be more self-disclosing.

The environment in which one lives also contributes to the way an individual reveals his or her innermost feelings. From what is known, many people do not want to disclose themselves because they feel that if they share their feelings and thoughts to others, others might laugh and make fun of them. Sometimes when they share their feelings to other people, they often feel betrayed. As a result, many do not want to share their feelings. This way, then, they learn to be more self-conscious of what others might say about them; thus, makes many to keep things to themselves.

#### Self-disclosure within the families

Based on the results of both surveys and interviews, it was interesting to note the different ways the Chuukese people disclose their feelings to other people. We also found out that there were more females who claimed to have no problems in expressing their feelings toward others. The males on the other hand seem not to be as open to other people.

For instance, within the average Chuukese families the parents both discipline the children. However, the mother is given most of the responsibility of disciplining the children. This is not to say

the father does not play an important role. In fact, some fathers are perceived by many children as role models and strict disciplinarians. That is why the children often go to the mother when they have problems, but if the children do something wrong, the mother is usually the one who gets the blame.

On the other hand, the role of the father seems a blur. Many fathers claim that they let their children freely communicate with them. However, from many wives' points of view, they claim that they are the ones who do most of the talking and disciplining and the fathers do the spanking when the children do something unacceptable.

In most families' cases, the children are the source of communication between the parents. Most husbands and wives hardly converse with one another. They only communicate when they think it is necessary. Sometimes they do not speak to one another until one of the children confronts one of them with a problem. In another case when the parents separate, the children becomes the go-betweens between the parents. Often, they are the ones who bring the parents back together. Therefore, because children contribute a lot to the family, many Chuukese parents are encouraging their children to speak their minds not only because they help the family stay together, but also because they set a good example to other families as well.

In fact, eight-five percent (82%) of the females and seventy-

five percent (75%) of the males we surveyed said that they would allow their children to freely communicate with them. When the participants were asked "why do they let their children communicate freely with them?", majority said they want their children to be more open in sharing what is bothering them and to be able to tell them what their problems are. (Refer to the charts at the back.)

Many parents want to change what they feel was not done right by their own parents. Having seen their own children growing up, they sometimes feel it is appropriate to change some aspects of the cultural practices which they think is not right. For example, when they were young, they were not encouraged to voice their opinions and how they felt. Therefore, if they feel this way, they now know how their own children feel and should be more understanding.

#### Self-disclosure in priesthood/clergy

People go to reveal their innermost feelings toward the clergy. Based on the interview questions, majority of the people go to see the clergy members because they trust them for they represent God with in the community. In addition, they feel more comfortable, relaxed, and secure because they feel that the priests can not go and tell other people about their problems. Another reason why a priest plays an important role in a Chuukese person's life is because priests tend to take one's problems more seriously.

The way in which priest expresses his feelings is different from the way an average Chuukese person would express himself or herself. Priests, most of the time express their feelings or problems to and with other people. The purpose for sharing the problems is to encourage other people to communicate or share their feelings with them.

Some people, on the other hand, would not go and see a priest. One reason is that they might be related to each other, and the person does not seem to be comfortable talking about his or her problems to a relative. Another reason is that other people are embarrassed to tell the priest his or her problems. They feel that the priest might view them differently. For instance, one thinks that if he or she tells a priest his or her problems, the priest might think of him or her as a bad person.

#### Self-disclosure within employment:

Even in the business world today, the term self-expression or self-disclosure is also evident. Here in Micronesia, particularly in Chuuk, the people who have average jobs tend to lower themselves than the ones who hold higher jobs. Such lowering of one's self can be shown through one's action toward another person. For instance, if an owner of a store finds out that something has been stolen or misplaced from the store, he might scold his employee for not doing his job in locking up the place. Even though the

employee was not responsible for the break-in or how much he likes his job, he would not speak up because he is afraid of speaking up against someone of a higher position. Therefore, this can lead the employee not to disclose any of his feelings at all.

On the other hand, let us take a closer look at people who hold high positions and those who work in government offices. Many government employees claim that they can express themselves towards someone of a higher rank if they had any hard feelings or disagreement. However, not all can do that. Only a few out of the many can do it.

However, for those who hold high positions such as deputy directors, managers, and so on, they disclose themselves with more ease. They can freely speak, criticize, and scold one another because perhaps they have the same levels of employment or they are close friends. In addition, they can easily talk to the co-workers because they feel that they have the authority to do so.

Judging from the answers that we received, we are likely to say that most Chuukese seem to be less self-disclosing. For example, when they were asked about how they would react to someone of a higher position, majority of the subjects said that they would not deal with it. Furthermore, it gives us the idea that they like to keep their hard feelings to themselves. Most of all, the average government workers rather keep their feelings to themselves because they are afraid of loosing their job. They feel that if

they express their hard feelings their boss would expel them.

Self-disclosure among students:

Students also have different ways of expressing their feelings. The most striking thing we discover is that the students would go to their classmates or friends when they have problems, instead of talking to their parents. The students believe that they cannot share secrets or personal problems with their relatives. They feel uncomfortable and uncertain if their relatives will keep their secret or they would reveal them out in the open that is why they rather confide in a non-relative.

We also encounter that some students like to share their problems with someone of his or her age. They believe that sharing secrets with one of their same age is the best because that person can relate better to their problem. If they share their personal problems with their parents, their parents might respond differently.

However, many students want to keep their problems to themselves because they believe they are responsible for their own problems. Others feel that nobody would want to be bothered with their problems. These people think that nobody cares about their problems.

On the other hand, only few students would like to share their problems. These students believe that sharing their problems will

help themselves as well as the person they are sharing their problems with. For example, the person who they share their problem to might have the same problems, and the sharing can help each other to find a better solution to their own problem.

### Conclusion:

To say that all Chuukese are "Self-disclosing" in the way that Wrenn and Mencke defined the term is inappropriate. One reason is because many Chuukese tend to keep personal issues to themselves. They mention them only to a selected number of individuals. In addition, we also found a few teenagers who are self-disclosing. These teenagers are mostly students, sometimes a very few adults, who have gone abroad for education.

With what is mentioned above, we have evidence to believe that those who have gone abroad for any form of education seem to be more outgoing, assertive, and self-disclosing. These individuals claim they would speak up to or against anyone if they feel they are right. Many of those who participated in our survey agreed that education does make these youngsters more self-disclosing and be able to speak freely to anyone.

However, self-disclosure also differs according to age. We found that the older a person is, the lesser self-disclosing he is going to be because he is more conservative. Thus, the younger a person is and the more exposed he is to the "western" culture, the

more likely he is to disclose himself. For instance, when we interviewed the old people, they had a hard time telling us their answers. However, the youngsteis expressed themselves without any reservation.

In the up coming years, perhaps the Chuukese will not be able to preserve the culture that they have today. The culture which wants it's people to be humble will soon diminish because the younger generation is changing what they believe is inappropriate to life today. The older people are trying their best to preserve what little of the culture that is left. This is very hard while the young ones are bombastic. This means that soon the older people will die and the new generation will be left in charge, by then the culture will be more westernized. Therefore, as the years go on and as the culture changes, people will start to open up and express their innermost feelings; and by then Wrenn's and Mencke's definition can be applied in Chuuk.

FEMALES

"THE TRUE AND FALSE CHART"

TRUE	FALSE
1. 41..... 58%	1. 29..... 42%
2. 33..... 47%	2. 37..... 52%
3. 26..... 37%	3. 44..... 62%
4. 29..... 41%	4. 41..... 58%
5. 48..... 68%	5. 22..... 31%
6. 38..... 54%	6. 32..... 45%
7. 56..... 80%	7. 14..... 20%
8. 51..... 72%	8. 19..... 27%
9. 67..... 95%	9. 3..... 4%
10. 36..... 51%	10. 34..... 48%
11. 53..... 75%	11. 17..... 24%
12. 45..... 64%	12. 25..... 35%
13. 53..... 75%	13. 17..... 24%
14. 43..... 61%	14. 27..... 33%

\* EVALUATING CHART OF FEMALES IN THE "TRUE AND FALSE", PART OF THE SURVEY.

TOTAL AMOUNT OF SUBJECTS: 117

FEMALES = 70  
47 (MALES)

MALES

"THE TRUE AND FALSE CHART"

TRUE	FALSE
1. 27..... 57%	1. 18..... 38%
2. 20..... 12%	2. 20..... 55%
3. 21..... 42%	3. 25..... 52%
4. 15..... 31%	4. 29..... 61%
5. 29..... 61%	5. 16..... 34%
6. 31..... 65%	6. 13..... 26%
7. 32..... 68%	7. 13..... 26%
8. 29..... 61%	8. 15..... 31%
9. 42..... 89%	9. 2..... 4%
10. 21..... 44%	10. 23..... 48%
11. 36..... 76%	11. 9..... 19%
12. 28..... 59%	12. 17..... 30%
13. 39..... 82%	13. 6..... 12%
14. 34..... 72%	14. 5..... 10%

\* EVALUATING CHART OF MALES IN THE "TRUE AND FALSE", PART OF THE SURVEY.

TOTAL AMOUNT OF SUBJECTS: 117

MALES: 47

70 (FEMALES)

## OVER-ALL EVALUATING CHART

PERCENTAGE/RESULT  
OF AGE GROUP:

<u>AGE</u>	<u>FEMALES</u>	<u>MALES</u>
	<u>PERCENTAGE</u>	<u>PERCENTAGE</u>
10-15	11%	4%
16-20	72%	43%
21-30	1%	21%
31-40	14%	17%
41-50	0%	8%
51-60	1%	6%
61-ABOVE	1%	1%

\* THIS IS A RESULT OF THE PERCENTAGE OF THE AGE GROUP IN BOTH SEXES.

- TOTAL AMOUNT OF SUBJECTS: 117
- TOTAL NUMBER OF MALE PARTICIPANTS: 47 --- 59%
- TOTAL NUMBER OF FEMALE PARTICIPANTS: 70 --- 41%

## OVERALL EVALUATING CHARTS

### PERCENTAGE/RESULT OF LEVEL OF EDUCATION

<u>LEVEL OF EDUCATION</u>	<u>FEMALES</u>	<u>MALES</u>
	<u>PERCENTAGE</u>	<u>PERCENTAGE</u>
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	1%	10%
HIGH SCHOOL	82%	47%
UNDERGRADUATE	7%	25%
GRADUATE	4%	6%
PROFESSIONAL	1%	0%
NONE OF THE ABOVE	5%	6%

\* THIS IS THE RESULT OF THE PERCENTAGE OF THE LEVEL OF EDUCATION BOTH SEXES.

- > TOTAL AMOUNT OF SUBJECTS: 117
- > TOTAL NUMBER OF MALES: 47 --- 41%
- > TOTAL NUMBER OF FEMALES: 70 --- 59%