

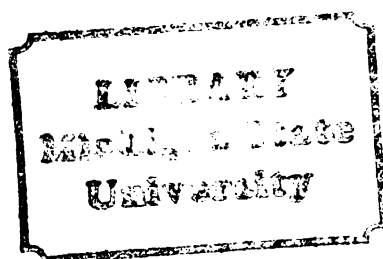
SOME EFFECTS OF
TABOO COMMUNICATION ON
INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Thesis for the Degree of M. A.
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
JOSE RUBEN JARA
1973

THESIS



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ABSTRACT

SOME EFFECTS OF TABOO COMMUNICATION ON INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

By

Jose Ruben Jara

This thesis is the report of a research undertaking which had the following objectives:

(1) To study the effects of taboo communication on interpersonal relationships, along four main dimensions: Safety-credibility, competence-credibility, perceived homophily, and interpersonal attraction.

(2) To explore the nature of possible relationships between taboo communication and (a) nonverbal patterns of response, and (b) reciprocated disclosure.

Taboo communication was defined as that category of message transfer in which the messages are perceived as extremely private and personal in nature because they deal with socially proscribed behavior or because the transfer of such messages is socially inappropriate. Because there are social sanctions normally associated with taboo communication, we can assume that antecedents of taboo communication are either:

1. Ignorance of the taboo nature of the communication; lack of social graces; intent to "shock" or offend;
or
2. A belief by the communicator that his message will not be construed as any of the above, but will be accepted as honest information about himself.

Since the latter form of taboo communication may be seen as typically disclosed only to friends, it indicates to the receiver that he is liked and trusted by the source. Hence, such communication may be assumed to be a reward for the receiver.

Further, Homan's notion of "distributive justice" (1961) and Jourard's "dyadic effect" (1971) lend support to the hypothesis that such rewards are likely to be returned. In Homan's words, "...outcomes exchanged will tend to be of comparable value."

In the present study, it was hypothesized that sources disclosing taboo information would be perceived as more trustworthy, less competent, more homophilous, and better liked. Further, considering the high saliency of taboo messages, these effects were expected to be maintained over time.

In order to test these hypotheses, the following experiment was conducted: Each of 29 female subjects interacted with a male confederate for a series of five meetings over a 2-1/2 week period. Each of these meetings lasted approximately 12 minutes. Nineteen of the subjects were randomly assigned to the experimental treatment, in which during the fourth session, the confederate disclosed that he was an ex-convict. The remaining ten subjects were assigned to the control group which did not receive any taboo information in any of the sessions. The dependent variables were measured with questionnaires filled out by the subjects at the end of each session.

Statistically significant results were found concerning the predicted immediate effects of taboo communication on safety-credibility and perceived homophily. However, it is likely that these significant relationships were not due to exposure to taboo communication, but to methodological limitations. The hypotheses concerning competence-credibility and interpersonal attraction were not supported.

These results were discussed in terms of possible shortcomings of the present study regarding (a) sample size, (b) lack of control in the experimental sessions, and (c) the possibility of biases introduced by the confederate such as his liking for the subjects.

Finally, it was recommended that future research undertakings should be aimed at the development of a scale of degree of "tabooness" for different topics, and the exploration of possible effects of taboo communication on communication networks, nonverbal patterns of response, interpersonal trust, and a number of other areas of human interaction.

SOME EFFECTS OF TABOO COMMUNICATION
ON INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

By

Jose Ruben Jara.

A THESIS

Submitted to

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for the degree of

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1973

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To my wife, Maye, who helped me to carry
out the basic functions of the graduate
student life: "Think, wait and fast."

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Chapter 1

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

Introduction

An open and honest communication among human beings is a deep concern of our age. This concern is clearly reflected in the expectations of students entering introductory courses in communication, in the proliferation --as well as the goals--of thousands of sensitivity and human relations groups, in the writings of scholars from many different disciplines, in the political campaigns of top-ranked politicians, and in the advertising efforts of many commercial organizations. The professional concerns of counselors, psychologists and psychiatrists, physicians and priests, and the interests of interviewers, lovers, spouses, and bosses, also indicate the need for a better understanding of honesty and openness* as processes of human interaction.

Therefore, the need to know the deep and honest side of our fellow communicators is important in many spheres of our culture. Taboo communication is an avenue to enhance openness in a communication situation.

The purpose of the present paper is to formalize and systematize the notion of taboo communication. The paper has the following objectives:

- (1) To study the effects of taboo communication on interpersonal relationships, along four main dimensions: Safety-credibility,

*By "openness" we mean an individual's readiness to disclose honest and truthful information, regardless of the nature of such information.

competence-credibility, perceived homophily, and interpersonal attraction.

- (2) To explore the nature of possible relationships between taboo communication and (a) nonverbal patterns of response, and (b) reciprocated disclosure.*

Taboo Communication: A Conceptualization

Taboo communication is that category of message transfer in which the messages are perceived by both sources and receivers as extremely private and personal in nature because they deal with proscribed behavior or because the transfer of such messages is socially inappropriate.

Farberow (1963) notes that the word "taboo" has two different sets of meanings. The first is "sacred" or "consecrated." The second is "uncanny," "dangerous," "forbidden," or "unclean." The second set of meanings should be used as referents for the word taboo in this thesis. Farberow (1963) cites some other definitions of taboo as something "forbidden by tradition or social usage or other authority; strongly disapproved as conflicting with conventions or settled beliefs, often among a particular class..." It is "a(n)...interdiction laid upon the usage of certain things or words or the performance of certain actions."

This conceptualization of taboo communication has the following implications:

- (1) The tabooeness of a message is two fold: the message can be taboo because the behavior stated in its content is a taboo (e.g., "I have

*This exploratory part of the study is not the main focus of this work; therefore, only a partial report and discussion is included in Chapter III.

been engaged in incestuous practices"), or because the transfer of such message in a taboo (e.g., "My wife is a great sex partner").

Obviously there is a close relationship between the two aspects of taboo communication. For example, it is difficult to conceive of a message with a taboo behavior stated in its content that is non-taboo in its transfer. However, it is possible to have messages that although dealing with usually acceptable behavior, are banned from open and free communication. For instance, sexual behavior among married couples is hardly a proscribed behavior, however, communicating about such behavior is not socially appropriate.

Thus, all messages dealing with taboo behaviors are also taboo in their transfer. However, the reverse is not necessarily true.

A taboo topic fosters tabooness about its transmission, resulting in decreased probability of its transmission. This decreased probability of transmission will tend to reinforce the taboo nature of the topic itself, which in turn increases the tabooness of its transmission. Of course, this circle can be broken at two levels. First, one can attempt to reduce the tabooness of the topic; this is very difficult since societal norms change only slowly.* Second, one can attempt to reduce the tabooness of the transmission, and in doing so, a counter-process starts: The more people communicating about the message, the lesser the degree of tabooness of that message, which in turn breeds higher levels of communication, and so on. Rogers (1972c) mentions an example of this strategy of breaking the tabooness of transferring a message:

*Among certain subpopulations (e.g., students) a change in norms may occur more rapidly.

Under usual conditions in India, the decision for vasectomy is very private. Individuals may fear the ridicule of their friends and neighbors, because the individual perceives that he is taking an act not fully sanctioned by the norms of his community. The taboo on vasectomy was overcome in a highly successful campaign in Ernakulam District in South India in 1971, in which over 63,000 sterilizations were performed in one month.

The taboo was overcome, in part, by creation of a festival spirit. The local mass media were employed to convey the message that 'everybody's doing it.' Door-to-door personal contacting of eligible men was concentrated in one community at a time to help create the impression that the vasectomy adoption decision was a popular one. Adopters were marshalled to travel in groups to the operating theaters at the Ernakulam City Hall. They marched together, singing songs about family planning and displaying signs. The gay festival spirit on the part of the many thousands of adopters helped break down the perception of vasectomy as a taboo, and thus contributed to the surprising success of the Ernakulam campaign, which has since been replicated in 25 additional districts in India.

- (2) Messages vary in their degree of tabooess along a continuum of "very taboo" to "slightly taboo." For instance, incest is a much more taboo topic than abortion in the U.S.
- (3) The degree of tabooess of a message is determined by the perceptions of the source and receiver. These perceptions generally arise through cultural descriptions and prescriptions (" 'Fuck' is a bad word--do not use it") which are taught during socialization processes. The socializing agents--parents, teachers, etc.---may provide category descriptions of taboo words ("words relating to sex and defecation are taboo") or they may specify particular words which are taboo ("Shit," "fuck," etc.). Proscriptions tend to be explicit and unqualified; therefore, the message that one should not say certain things is clear to everyone.

There may be some variance in the degree to which different people will perceive the "tabooess" in a given word. This variance may result from

different people's experiences in regard to their relevant person's reactions to taboo communication. For instance, a child's estimation of the degree of tabooeness of a given word may depend on the degree to which his parents seemed disturbed at the mention of the word, and/or the degree to which they punished him for using it.

(4) Because there are social sanctions normally associated with taboo communication we can assume that antecedents of taboo communication are either:

1. Ignorance of the taboo nature of the communication; lack of social graces; intent to "shock" or offend.
2. A belief by the communicator that his message will not be construed as any of the above, but will be accepted as honest information about himself.

The following scheme identifies some of the variables that can be considered as having a significant influence on the degree of tabooeness of messages:*

1. Cultural norms. Norms are defined as the most frequently occurring pattern of overt behavior among members of a particular culture. The norms of a culture determine, to a great extent, whether a certain message is taboo or not for that particular culture. For instance, while virginity is not a taboo topic in the U.S., in Mexico (or many other latin American countries), it would be considered highly taboo.

*Although no claim is made in regard to the exhaustiveness of this list, the most important categories of variables are believed to be included.

2. Societal norms. Within a given society, a hierarchy of tabooess can be observed. Further, messages can be categorized in such a hierarchy in terms of their reference to behaviors that are illegal, immoral, or contrary to strongly held norms. Societal norms emphasize where a certain message is placed along the tabooess continuum.

3. Circumstantial variables such as time, place, and participants. For instance, the message "I have V.D." is not a taboo topic between a physician and his patient. However, such a message would be more taboo when discussed between father and son, and especially taboo when other members of the family are present. Moreover, such communication is likely to be definitely banned from the usual dinner table.

Further, an issue generally perceived as taboo at time₁ may be much less so at time₂. For instance, divorce, which was considered a highly taboo behavior 20 years ago, is much less so in 1973 in the U.S.

4. Referent of the message. One can distinguish at least two levels:

(a) Self referent. The communication source discloses information regarding his personal involvement with the taboo topic; for instance, a woman who discloses that she has had an abortion.

(b) General referent. The content of the message only discloses an interest in, or some degree of knowledge about, the general nature of the taboo topic; for instance, an individual who states a position regarding his support of abortion reform legislation.

Generally, the more personal the level of reference to the topic, the more taboo the communication.

5. Individual differences. The way taboo communication has been conceptualized implies two dimensions. First, taboo communication has a "socio -

logical" dimension since it is the society that marks a certain topic or behavior as taboo. Secondly, there is a "psychological" dimension since these taboo topics or behaviors are tempered by the individual's perceptions and personality factors. For instance, while some women feel free to publicize that they have had an abortion, others will tell only their most intimate female friend. By the same token, while some individuals feel highly embarrassed when confronted with the disclosure that the other person has had an abortion; some others might react in a very casual manner. One of the most important variables in this respect might be the individual's general tendency toward openness or self-disclosure.*

6. Semantic variables: The connotations of the words employed in messages are sometimes reinforcers of the tabooeness of those messages, thus preventing social change. An example of such inhibition of a change is provided by Rogers (1972c):

In India, the word 'French Leather' (condom) had a negative connotation because it was perceived as an object used by soldiers with prostitutes to prevent venereal disease, thus inhibiting the use of condoms as a means of family planning. As soon as the word was changed to "Nirodh," which had a neutral connotation because it was not previously included in the common lexicon, the semantic change facilitated communication and millions of condoms were sold.

In summary, it can be concluded that the degree of tabooeness of a message is a perceived variable affected by cultural, individual (idiosyncratic), and situation-specific variables.

The Present Study: Rationale and Theoretical Hypotheses

Two of the most influential theories of social interaction for present purposes are those offered by Homans (1950, 1961) and Thibaut and Kelley

*Jourard (1971) defined self-disclosure as "the process of making the self known."

(1959). Both theories seek to explain social interaction in terms of its payoffs or outcomes. It is our contention that taboo communication is one such outcome.

Most taboo communication is highly private in nature, confidential in tone, and anxiety-producing. To communicate about a taboo topic is to take a perceived risk: That the receiver may disclose such information to others, with consequent dangers to the original source. Since such information may be seen as typically disclosed only to friends, it indicates to the recipient that he is liked and trusted by the source. Hence, such a communication may be assumed to be a reward or positive outcome for the receiver. "The positive outcomes which one may gain from a social interaction are varied and often very subtle" (Worthy *et. al.*, 1969).

Another basic principle of social exchange is that among peers, the outcomes exchanged will tend to be of comparable value. This tendency toward fair exchange is referred to by Homans as "distributive justice," by Gouldner (1960) as the "norm of reciprocity," and by Jourard (1971) as the "Dyadic effect."

Hypothesis One: In summary, we propose that when an individual becomes the receiver of a taboo communication, he will feel trusted by the source. Further, the receiver will feel the need to reciprocate such trust in kind, thus, trusting the source. Formally stated,

H₁: Individuals receiving taboo communication will tend to evaluate the source of the information as having greater safety-credibility than do individuals who have not received such information from the same source.

Credibility is defined as the degree to which a communication source or channel is perceived by a receiver as trustworthy and competent. This de-

inition, derived from Hovland and others (1953), was somewhat modified by Berlo et. al., (1970). Although Berlo et. al. proposed a third "meaningful and statistically independent dimension for evaluating message sources: dynamism," this dimension was not included in the present analysis because (1) there were no theoretical reasons to expect any change, (2) as warned by Berlo et. al., (1970), there is the strong possibility that this dimension "would not be psychologically independent of the evaluations on the other two dimensions."

Following both Hovland and Berlo, safety-credibility is defined as the degree to which the source is perceived as objective, honest, and unselfish.

Watzlawick et. al., (1967) advanced the axiom that "Every communication has a content and a relationship aspect such that the latter classifies the former and is therefore a metacommunication." What has been proposed previously is that in taboo messages, the relationship aspect of the communication is both great in value and rewarding. The higher the degree of tabooeness of the message-content, the higher its perceived metacommunicational value--and therefore the more rewarding.

However, this content/relationship dichotomy suggests the possibility of an interaction between the content and the relationship aspects of a message. Such interaction is particularly relevant in taboo communication since the content of taboo topics by definition deals with proscribed behavior. Therefore, one confronts a situation where the receiver may react negatively toward the content and positively toward the disclosure of such content.

Hypothesis Two: This leads to the hypothesis that individuals, reacting to the relational aspect of the message, will tend to evaluate sources as being higher in safety-credibility (e.g., I trust you because you trust me by being open and honest with me). However, when reacting to the content aspect of the message,

H₂: Individuals receiving taboo communication will tend to evaluate the source of the information as having lower competence-credibility than do individuals who have not received such information from the same source.

Following Hovland et. al., (1953) and Berlo et. al., (1970), competence-credibility is defined as the degree to which the source is perceived as knowledgeable, intelligent, and experienced.

"If the reception of a taboo communication is indeed a social reward, the receiver of such communication should be expected to react in a manner consonant with those principles that have been found to govern other types of social exchange" (Worthy et. al., 1969). One expectation about social exchange is that greater rewards are associated with greater interpersonal attraction. Thibaut and Kelley (1959) pointed out the close relationship between sociometric choice and the ability and willingness to provide positive outcomes. One who provides positive outcomes tends to be liked; likewise, one tends to extend more positive outcomes to those to whom one likes. If, as suggested here, reception of a taboo communication serves as a positive outcome, it is to be expected that liking and taboo communication will be positively related.* Hypothesis three:

H₃: Individuals receiving taboo communication will tend to be more interpersonally attracted toward the source of the

*It should be noted that interpersonal attraction also might facilitate taboo communication, so that the relationship among the two variables would be mutually reinforcing.

information than individuals who have not received such information from the same source.

Interpersonal attraction is defined as the degree of favorableness of attitude toward another person.

Jourard (1971) noted the importance of perceived interpersonal similarity to the area of self disclosure. On the basis of the kinds of persons subjects indicated they disclosed themselves to, Jourard concluded that "...disclosure of the self is a byproduct, among other things, of the perception or belief that the other, the target person is similar to the self."

Rogers (Forthcoming) also pointed out the usual occurrence of this "similarity" phenomenon in the field of family planning communication. He states: "Taboo communication is more likely to occur among homophilous individuals."

These statements suggest a certain degree of directionality and time-order: First homophily, then taboo communication. In the present research, the expected order of the variables has been reversed in order to explore the possibility of creating a certain degree of perceived homophily through taboo communication.

H₄: Individuals receiving taboo communication will perceive the source as being more homophilous than do individuals who have not received such information from the same source.

Perceived homophily is the degree to which one individual perceives another individual as being like himself.

Chapter II

METHODOLOGY

To study the effects of taboo communication and therefore test the hypotheses presented in the previous chapter, the following study was designed.

Design

Each of 29 female subjects interacted with a male confederate for a series of five meetings, over a 2 1/2 week period. The first four meetings lasted twelve minutes, and the fifth seven. The meetings were scheduled twice a week in either Mondays and Wednesdays, or Tuesdays and Thursdays. The subjects were told that they were interacting with another randomly-assigned subject of the opposite sex.

Upon arriving at the experimental room, both subject and confederate were informed of the nature of the experiment and instructed about their task (see Appendix A). The task consisted of the twelve minutes interaction, and, at the end, filling out questionnaires containing the measurement instruments for the main dependent variables (Appendix B). By plotting the group mean on each of those variables for each of the five sessions, a graphic representation of change over time was obtained (See Figures 3-A, 3-B, 3-C, 3-D).

Ten of the subjects were randomly assigned to the control group, while the remaining nineteen were exposed to the experimental stimulus, consist-

ing of the disclosure by the confederate that he was an ex-convict on parole (who went to prison because of embezzlement). The disclosure in the experimental group occurred about midway during the fourth session. The control group did not receive this taboo information.

Pretest

All the procedures previously outlined, as well as the detailed descriptions presented in this chapter, were pre-tested with three subjects. All of the subjects were exposed to the experimental stimulus.

The Sample

In recruiting the subjects, a delicate problem was confronted: They had to be reliable people who would commit themselves to come five times for approximately thirty minute periods. They also had to be prompt so that a tight schedule of experimental sessions could be followed. To further complicate the problem, neither academic nor economic rewards were available to the subjects.

Subjects were 30 unmarried female undergraduates enrolled in introductory communication classes at Michigan State University. Of the initial 30 subjects, five did not come for the first session and had to be replaced. These subjects as well as those who could not arrive at a specific time on certain dates were asked to return on Fridays to make up for the lost session. A positive outcome of this procedure was the negligible drop-out rate; only one subject did not want to continue in the study after two sessions because of other personal commitments.

The final sample consisted of 28 white and one black college females with a mean age of 19.2 years.

When recruiting the subjects, they were asked to participate in an "interpersonal communication study in which we are trying to explore how relationships among people develop over time." No mention was made about self disclosure or taboo communication.

The Confederate

The confederate was a 29 year-old senior in Communication studying at Michigan State University for one term.

For control reasons, it was necessary to use only one confederate. Of course, this posed a heavy burden on him since he had to deal with 15 subjects four days a week starting at 8:30 a.m. and finishing at 1:30 p.m.

This schedule only allowed for twenty minutes per subject: Three for instructions, twelve for the interaction, and five for the confederate to relax and prepare for the next subject.

Setting and Procedures

The interaction took place in an office located on the fifth floor of South Kedzie Hall on the Michigan State University campus. The subjects were asked to report initially to an office located in the second floor of the same building, where the confederate reported also. Then, both were brought to the experimental room where they heard a tape of the instructions (Appendix A).

After the interaction had taken place, they were taken to different offices: The confederate to an office in the fifth floor, and the subject to an office in the fourth floor. In this office the subject was asked to fill out the questionnaire corresponding to that session.*

*All this maneuvering was intended to prevent the encounter of two or more subjects and the confederate.

The experimental room contained a desk with a chair on each side, a couple of bookcases full of boxes with stationary, and a stack of boxes set against the outside wall directly in front of the subject (see Figure 2-A). One of these boxes contained a video tape camera. The box had a hole smaller than a dime but large enough to let the lens record the upper half of the subjects' bodies.

This video equipment was used to record four minutes of interaction of session IV during the confederate's disclosure of the taboo information. The wires and cables that went out through the windows were not visible to the subjects, and neither was the video tape recorder operated from another office.

The video tape equipment used for this experiment was: (1) One Ampex video tape recorder model VR5100 (1" tape), (2) one Sony video camera model CVC-2100A with a 50mm lens, (3) one Fanon intercome system model classic 1N-2, and (4) one Comtel T.V. monitor (18" diagonal).

At the end of the fifth session the subjects were thoroughly debriefed about the nature and the objectives of the experiment. None of the subjects had any serious complaints, and some of them expressed their interest in the results of the present study.

From an ethical point of view, the most serious issue involved in the experiment was the videotaping of the subjects. They were informed of the existence of their tape and asked if such tape could be analysed. None of them were opposed. Moreover, some of them who showed interest in seeing their films were invited for individual presentations during the following weeks.

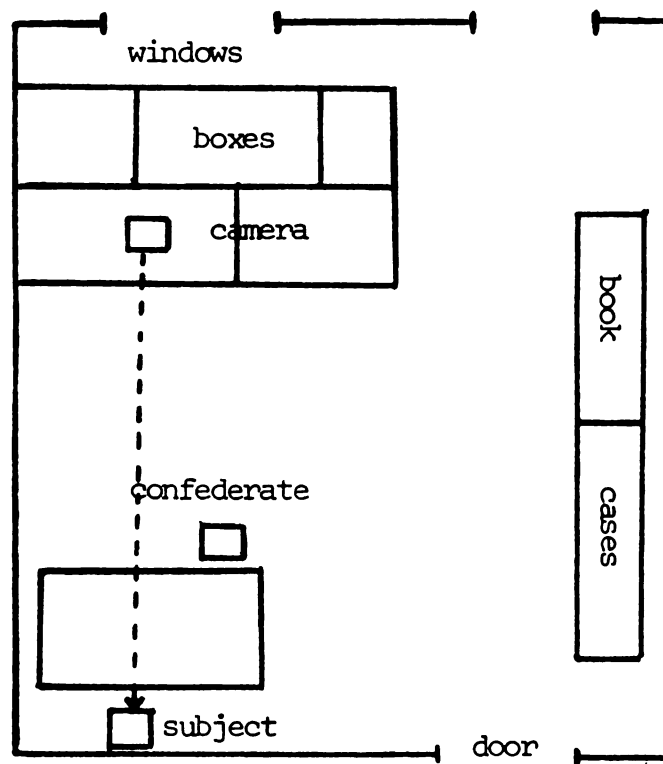


Figure 2-A. The Experimental Room for the Present Study

The Topic

In choosing the topic of disclosure for the experimental group, two criteria were followed: In the first place the topic had to be strongly disapproved and conflicting with conventions or settled beliefs. Secondly, although high in its degree of tabooess, the topic had to be credible enough so that the subjects would not be suspicious of its legitimacy. Following these guidelines, the topic of imprisonment due to embezzlement and the subsequent parole of the confederate, was chosen.

Immediately after session four (as well as after all the other sessions), the subjects responded to the open-ended question: "What do you consider to be the most valuable information your partner gave you today?" A content analysis of the responses from the experimental group shows that 16 out of the 19 subjects remembered and wrote down the taboo message. This finding gives some indication of the high saliency of the taboo message and the lasting impression it produced.

In order to get some idea about the different feelings elicited by the taboo message, a specially designed questionnaire was administered to the subjects at the end of session 5, after they had responded the usual questionnaire containing the measurement instruments for the dependent variables.

The first question asked "How intimate or personal do you think is the following information that your partner gave you: That he is an ex-convict."* The subjects answered this question by rating the information

*"That he is an ex-convict" was handwritten in order to give the subjects the impression that the production of this statement was not pre-arranged.

on a 7 interval scale:

Extremely private and personal	<u>7</u> : <u>6</u> : <u>5</u> : <u>4</u> : <u>3</u> : <u>2</u> : <u>1</u>	Not intimate or personal at all
-----------------------------------	--	------------------------------------

The mean rating obtained from the 19 subjects was $\bar{x} = 5.47$, which yields some indication of the moderate tabooess of the message.

In question 2, the subjects were asked to express their feelings at the moment of receiving the taboo information. The question was open-ended and a content analysis of the responses indicated that the main reaction elicited by the message was surprise. All the feelings expressed by the subjects in answering this question are summarized below:

<u>Feeling</u>	<u>Number of people who mentioned this feeling</u>
Surprise	12
Curiosity	4
Uncomfortableness	3
Flattery	3
Suspicion	3
Closeness to the other person	1
No reaction	1

The next question was: Do you think the disclosure of that information changed your image of him? To this question, 17 subjects answered "no" and 2 answered "yes." When asked how the taboo information changed their image of the confederate, one of those two subjects responded that the information made the confederate more interesting as a person, while the other subject said she thought the confederate was a "better person for saying it."

Question 4 was: After your partner's disclosure, do you think you changed your own disclosure toward him (openness toward him)? Seventeen subjects answered "no," and two answered "yes," a little.

In question 5, subjects were asked if they felt trusted because of the confederate's disclosure. The answer was given on a seven-interval scale

with anchor points of "NOT TRUSTED AT ALL--VERY MUCH TRUSTED." The group mean (N=19) was 5.2.

Finally, a group mean (N=19) of 5.6 was obtained for the question: Did you trust your partner after his disclosure? The semantic differential where the question was to be answered was "VERY MUCH SO--NOT AT ALL."

The Sessions

The reasons for including five sessions in the experimental design were:

1. The study would approach "real life" as much as possible.
2. The confederate could develop a good rapport with the subjects.
3. The taboo communication would seem to be in place and normal, as opposed to a two-session study in which subjects would probably be suspicious of such an intimate information being released so soon.
4. A rough measurement of the initial processes of interpersonal evaluation (regarding the dependent variables) could be observed under somewhat controlled conditions, such as keeping constant the target of evaluation i.e., the confederate, as well as the information released by him.
5. The initial fluctuations of the dependent variables due to interpersonal evaluation-re-evaluation processes mentioned before would be somewhat more stabilized after three previous sessions, and, therefore, the effects of taboo communication could be more reliably observed.

Session I.

The goal during the first session was to acquaint subject and confederate at a superficial level. As expected, the subjects did not follow an

identical pattern of interaction. Nevertheless, the interactions did not differ along critical dimensions such as the degree of intimacy or tabooeness of the information exchanged.

It should be stressed that the information provided by the confederate was identical across subjects. Every attempt was made to standardize the mode in which the confederate presented the information about himself throughout the experiment. The information provided by the confederate during the first session was:

I am 25 years old, a senior in Communication at the University of Colorado. I am here this quarter to study under the guidance of a faculty member and plan to return next year to do graduate work. I am interested in the field of diffusion of innovations. I am a veteran of the Navy where I served for four years. My favorite sport is cross-country skiing. This Term I am taking a class in Chinese history, a class in Romance film where we study famous directors such as Fellini, and an independent study. I live in Denver, Colorado with my family, who are from Italy. I own a window-cleaning business.

Obviously this information was scattered during the session, following the flow of the conversation.

Session II

During this session the subject and the confederate elaborated upon two main topics: Hobbies and vacation plans. The particular information given out by the confederate was:

I intend to spend the coming Christmas break in Aspen and Denver, Colorado. I enjoy racing bicycles and playing squash. My main hobbie is to read all kinds of literature but especially non-fiction. The author I like the most is Albert Camus.

Session III

The main focus of this session was the different attitudes toward the issues brought up by the presidential campaigns such as presidential preferences, legalization of abortion, the Vietnam war, the Congressional race, etc.

Session IV

The session started with the confederate taking the initiative and asking the subject to state her desires and goals for a job in the present or future. He probed the subject of what she considered would be the main strains and satisfactions of such a job. Following the subject's response, the confederate told all the subjects about his plans of becoming a university faculty member, and then, for the control group, he elaborated on how difficult it was to reach that goal because of the rigorous qualifications one has to meet to become a faculty member. For the experimental group, he stated the difficulty of reaching such a goal because of the handicap of being an ex-convict.

Since this session was being videotaped, it was possible to observe the reactions of the subjects toward the disclosure. For the subjects who probed the confederate on the taboo issue, the response was that he had been in prison for two years because of embezzlement and that at the present time he was on parole. For the subjects that did not probe on this issue, the session finished along the same lines of conversation about work-related matters.

Session V

The purpose of this session was twofold: (1) to obtain a delayed measurement on the dependent variables, (2) to have some time to debrief

the subjects. Accordingly, the time was limited to only seven minutes of interaction. Although the session was left basically open, for the most part, the subjects talked about it being the last session and their perceptions of the study. The confederate's comments were neutral, and he only elaborated on information received in prior sessions.

Operationalization of the Variables

The independent variable, taboo communication, was basically operationalized as the message: "I would like to become a university professor but I will probably have some problems in getting a job because I am an ex-convict."

As for the dependent measures of safety- and competence-credibility, the following adjective pairs* were drawn from the Berlo, et. al. (1970) study on source credibility:

1. SAFETY: safe-unsafe; just-unjust; kind-cruel; friendly-unfriendly; honest-dishonest
2. COMPETENCE: trained-untrained; experienced-unexperienced; skilled-unskilled; qualified-unqualified; informed-uninformed

These terms served as the anchor points on a seven-interval scale in which the subjects were asked to rate the confederate by marking the interval closest to their feelings. The scales were scored so that a total score of 35 for any of the dimensions would be the most extreme positive rating, and a total score of 5 would be the most extreme negative rating.

In the actual questionnaire given to the subjects (see Appendix B), the safety and competence scales were alternated and randomly reversed.

*Berlo et. al. (1970) report these adjective pairs as being "the most representative of each dimension of source credibility."

Interpersonal attraction was operationalized as the score obtained from indexing the following four items:

1. I was attracted by the other person.
2. I disliked the other person.
3. I wouldn't want to interact with the other person again.
4. I would like to have the other person as a friend.

These items were evaluated by the subjects in terms of the following scale:

- SA -- Strongly agree with the statement.
 A -- Agree with the statement.
 N -- Neither agree nor disagree with the statement.
 D -- Disagree with the statement.
 SD -- Strongly disagree with the statement.

The positive or negative phrasing of the statements was randomly determined.

The values assigned to this response scale ranged from 1 to 5. The 1 representing a strongly unfavorable attitude, and 5 a strongly favorable attitude. A value of 3 was given to the neutral statement.

Using a similar procedure for evaluation and scoring, perceived homophily was operationalized as the score obtained from the rating made by respondents to the item:

"I felt the other person was like me."

Factor Analysis of the Dependent Measures

In order to test the extent to which the measurement instruments for the dependent variables were indeed measuring different variables, a factor analysis was performed on the data gathered at time₄, right after the taboo communication had taken place. The analysis involved a principal axis solution followed by two varimax rotation analyses with Kiel-Wrigley criteria

set at four and five.* The means and standard deviations for each item, as well as an intercorrelation matrix for all the items, are presented in Appendices D and E, respectively.

The four factor solution (Table 2-1) showed that the prime loadings of the items were basically clustered around the expected dimensions: Competence-credibility (F_1), interpersonal attraction (F_2), safety-credibility (F_3), and perceived homophily (F_4). However, the competence and safety dimensions of credibility were not well structured. For instance, the items Experienced-Unexperienced, and Qualified-Unqualified, that should have loaded on F_1 , loaded on F_3 .

In the four factor solution, F_1 (competence-credibility) accounted for 19.8 percent of the variance, F_2 (interpersonal attraction) explained 21.6 percent, F_3 (safety-credibility) explained 33.3 percent, and F_4 (perceived homophily) accounted for 10 percent of the variance,** yielding an 84.9 total percent of variance explained.

In the five factor solution (Appendix C) the prime loadings for the item Qualified-Unqualified shifted from F_3 to F_1 . However, the higher loading for the item Experienced-Unexperienced remained in F_3 . In this solution, it was also observed that two interpersonal attraction items ("I was attracted by the other person" and "I would like to date the other person") shifted their prime loadings constituting the additional factor. This shift can be

*The five factor solution was performed in order to explore the possibility of increasing the "purity" of the factors obtained in the four factor solution, and, at the same time, observe what would be the composition of the new factor (which turned out to be physical attractiveness).

**This small percentage of variance explained might be due to the fact perceived homophily was measured with only one item: "I felt the other person was like me," and hence was an unreliable measure.

Table 2-1. Four Factor Rotation Solution:
Rotated Factor Loadings^a (N=29).

Item ^b	Factor Loading				
	F ₁	F ₂	F ₃	F ₄	h ²
¹ SAFE-UNSAFE	(346)	-313	<u>755*</u>	133	806
² JUST-UNJUST	191	-038	<u>798*</u>	(270)	748
³ KIND-CRUEL	241	(-278)	<u>836*</u>	252	897
⁴ FRIENDLY-UNFRIENDLY	(384)	-163	<u>794*</u>	273	881
⁵ HONEST-DISHONEST	(335)	-212	<u>818*</u>	198	867
⁶ TRAINED-UNTRAINED	<u>794*</u>	-175	(477)	130	907
⁷ EXPERIENCED-UNEXPERIENCED	(<u>410</u>)	-372	705*	069	809
⁸ SKILLED-UNSKILLED	<u>769*</u>	-165	(502)	197	911
⁹ QUALIFIED-UNQUALIFIED	(<u>604</u>)	-208	694*	074	897
¹⁰ INFORMED-UNINFORMED	<u>674*</u>	-231	(597)	179	897
¹¹ I was attracted by the other person	-098	<u>-727*</u>	(445)	278	814
¹² I liked the other person	328	<u>-582*</u>	392	(491)	842
¹³ I would want to interact again	298	<u>-584*</u>	313	(451)	732
¹⁴ I would like his friendship	(520)	<u>-617*</u>	243	346	831
¹⁵ I liked my partner ^c	(424)	<u>-762*</u>	092	281	849
¹⁶ I would like to date him ^c	(090)	<u>-940*</u>	088	-043	902
¹⁷ I felt the other person was like me	136	-252	(322)	800*	826
Variance Explained by the Factor	19.84%	21.55%	33.27%	10.18%	

the underlined values represent where the prime loadings were expected.

* Prime loadings

() Second highest loading

^a Decimal point omitted

^b Items 1-5 correspond to safety-credibility; 6-10 to competence-credibility; 11-16 to interpersonal attraction; and 17, to perceived homophily.

^c It should be noted that although these two items were factor-analyzed, they were not included in the index of interpersonal attraction; rather, they were separately analyzed in the exploratory part of the study.

interpreted as a dimension of interpersonal attraction more directly related to physical attractiveness.

The fact that several items did not have very pure loadings, led to a further analysis of the intercorrelation matrix (Appendix E), which showed rather high zero-order correlation coefficients between the vast majority of the items. Nevertheless, careful analysis of this matrix indicates that the items corresponding to each factor did generally yield higher correlation coefficients among themselves than with the items in the other factors. Therefore, they were indexed so that each item was equally weighted, according to the initial operationalization of the variables.

All these results taken together, point toward the unidimensionality of the four dependent variables that can be considered as cosymptoms of an intimacy-friendship syndrome in interpersonal relations. This interpretation of the data is consistent with the findings of Newcomb (1956) who reports that perceived similarity is related to attraction, and both of them to trust.

Chapter III

RESULTS

In the analysis of the data, there were two types of change that could be observed. First, the difference between the mean scores of the experimental group on a given dependent variable at two subsequent times (e.g., $\bar{D} = \bar{X}_{T_4} - \bar{X}_{T_3}$). Second, a comparison between the mean difference scores for the experimental (\bar{D}_x) and the control (\bar{D}_c) groups.

The hypotheses advanced in this thesis seemed to call most closely for the latter type of test. However, for computational purposes, both tests were performed.* Table 3-1 shows that no statistically significant t values are found for any of the dependent variables when comparing change on the mean scores for the experimental group at time₄ (T₄) and time₃ (T₃).

Table 3-1. Summary of the Findings for All the Dependent Variables When Comparing the Means of the Experimental Group at T₄-T₃.

	Dependent Variables			
	Safety-Credibility	Competence-Credibility	Interpersonal Attraction	Perceived Homophily
\bar{X}_{T_4} (N=19) ^a	29.16	29.05	14.63	2.68
\bar{X}_{T_3} (N=19) ^b	29.16	29.26	14.89	2.57
$S_{\bar{D}_x}^c$	0.62	0.64	0.42	0.26
$S\bar{D}_c$	2.19	1.84	0.92	0.10
D^d	-0.00	-0.21	-0.26	0.10
t value	(-)0.00 ^{ns}	(-)0.32 ^{ns}	(-)0.33 ^{ns}	0.39 ^{ns}

Table 3-1. Summary of the Findings for All the Dependent Variables When Comparing the Means of the Experimental Group at T_4 - T_3 . (con't)

- a Mean scores for the experimental group at time₄.
 - b Mean scores for the experimental group at time₃.
 - c Standard deviations for experimental and control groups.
 - d Mean difference scores.
-
-

Figures 3-A, 3-B, 3-C, and 3-D, depict the mean scores for the experimental and control groups on each of the dependent variables at each measurement time. Note that higher scores indicate more positive evaluations.

Empirical Hypothesis One:

Mean difference scores on safety-credibility between T_4 and T_3 will be significantly higher for the experimental group than for the control group.

This hypothesis is tested by a t-test for difference between two sample means, \bar{D}_x and \bar{D}_c at T_4 - T_3 (Table 3-2). The t value is 2.14, which is greater than the 2.05 required for significance at the 5 percent level. Thus, Hypothesis one is not rejected. Note, however, that as Table 3-2 shows, while no change occurs in the means for the experimental group, the mean for the control group drops by -1.2 points. Thus, it is concluded that the significant difference found is not due to the predicted effects of taboo communication.

*(Footnote from previous page) In order to compute the t-test for difference between two sample means, we had to calculate the t-test between two correlated sample means in the first place.

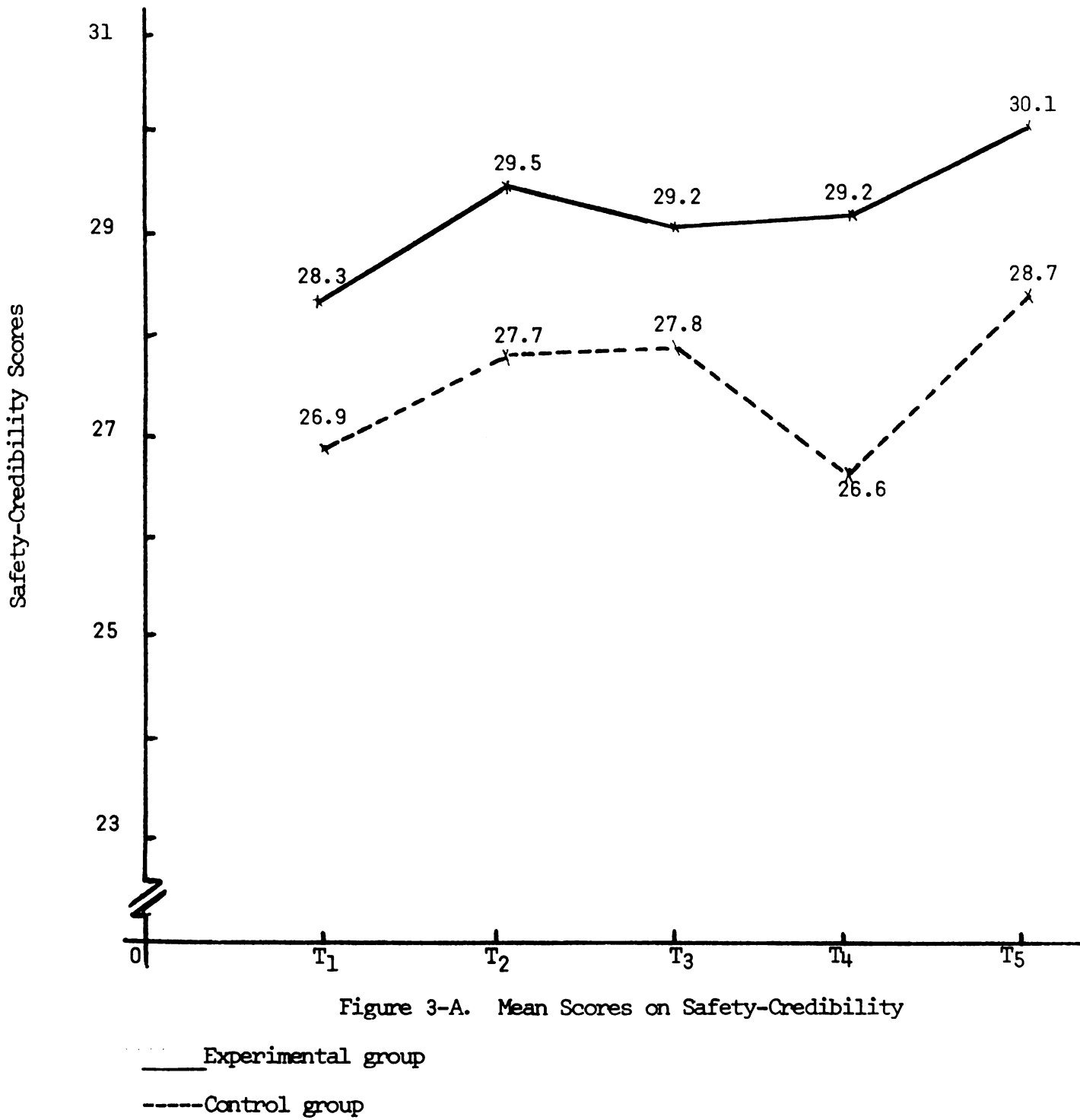


Figure 3-A. Mean Scores on Safety-Credibility

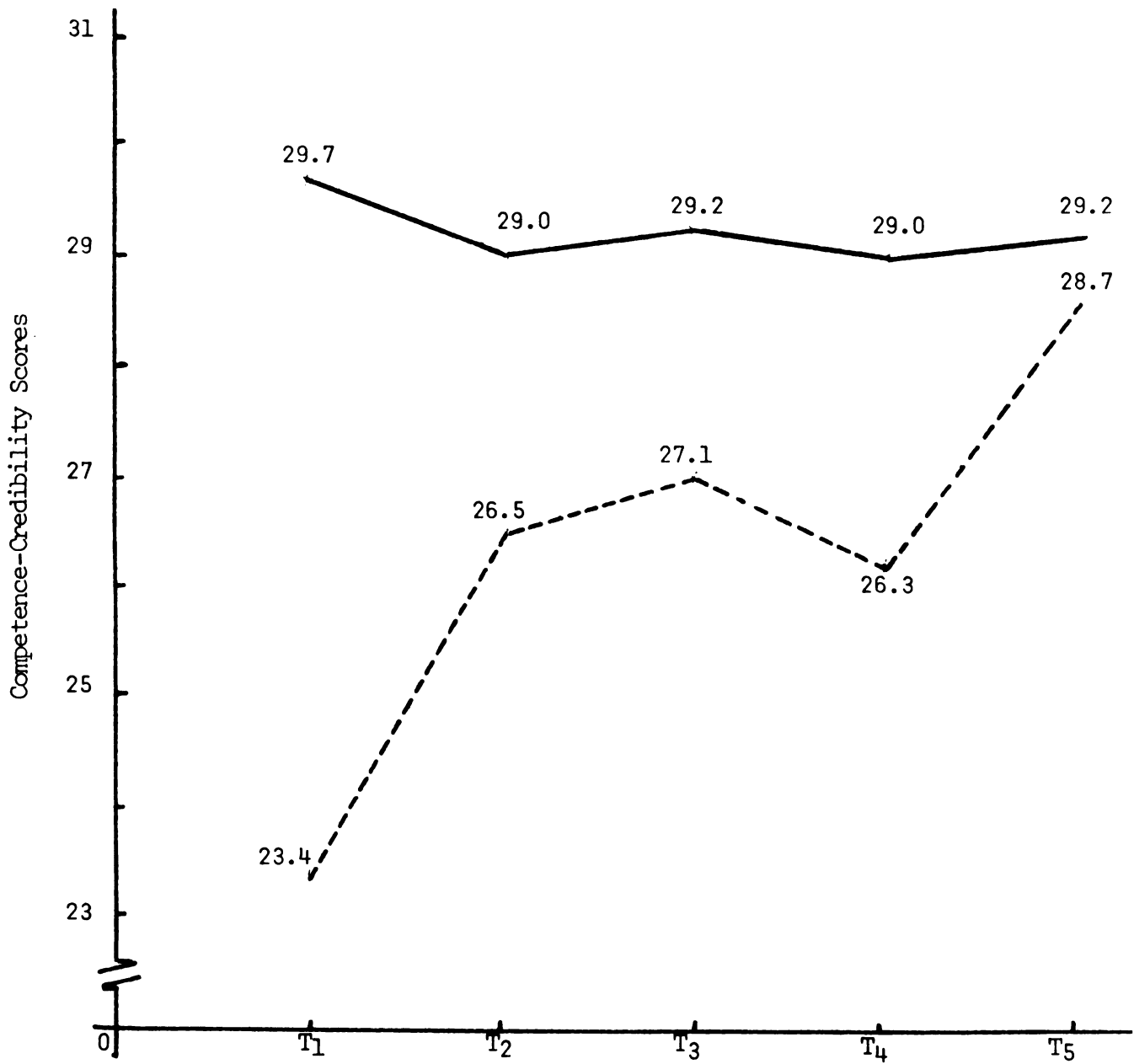


Figure 3-B. Mean Scores on Competence-Credibility

— Experimental Group
- - - Control Group

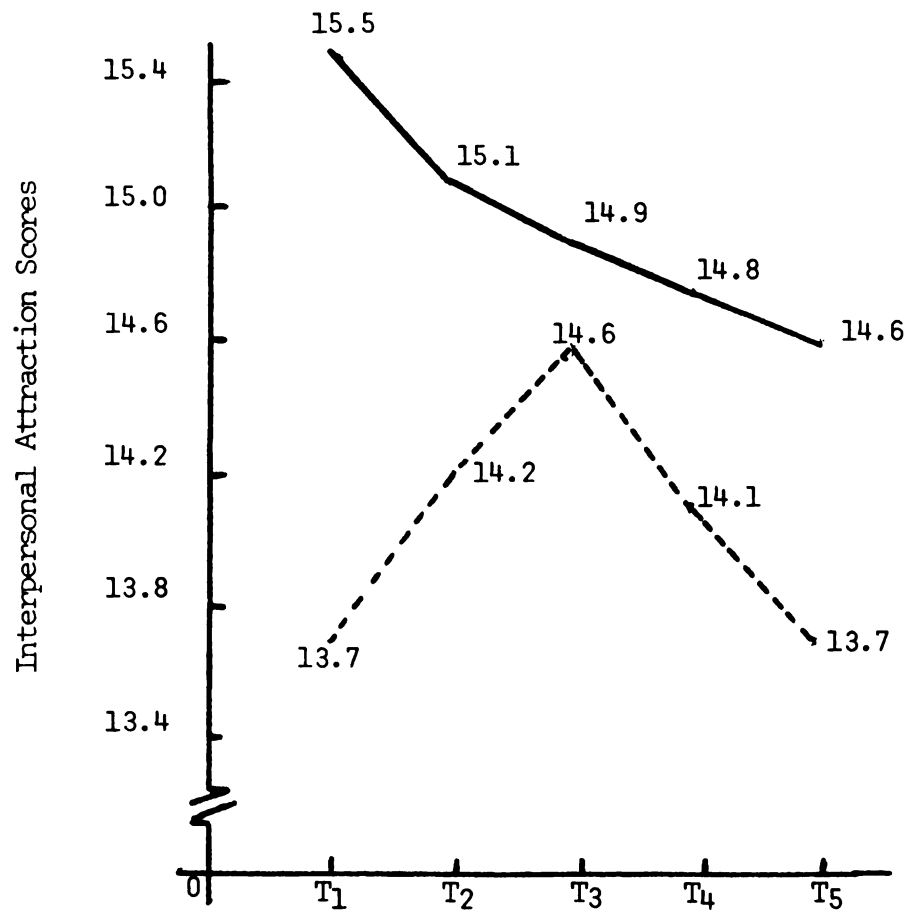


Figure 3-C. Mean Scores on Interpersonal Attraction

____ Experimental Group
----- Control Group

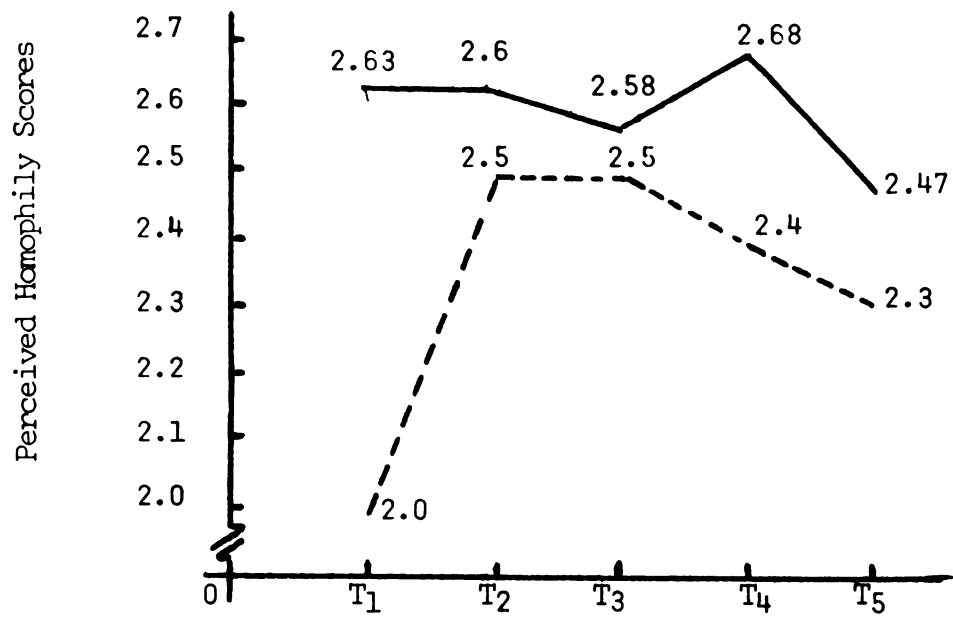


Figure 3-D. Mean Scores on Perceived Homophily

— Experimental Group
---- Control Group

Table 3-2. Summary of Findings for Safety-Credibility When Comparing \bar{D}_x and \bar{D}_c at T_3 and T_4 .^a

	Standard Deviation	Group Mean		Mean Difference Score	t Value
		\bar{T}_3	\bar{T}_4	\bar{D}	
Experimental Group - X(N=19)	0.62	29.16	29.16	0.00	
Control Group - C(N=10)	2.19	27.80	26.60	-1.20	
				1.20	2.14*

*P= .05, df=27

Empirical Hypotheses Two:

Mean difference scores of competence-credibility between T_4 and T_3 will be significantly lower for the experimental group than those for the control group when comparing T_4-T_3 .

Following the same statistical procedures mentioned before, t is 1.21, which is smaller than the 2.05 required for significance at $p=.05$, $df=27$. Thus, hypothesis two is rejected. As shown in Table 3-3, the predicted decrement in the mean score of the experimental group does occur and results in the negative \bar{D}_x , at T_4-T_3 . However, such difference is very small. Moreover, \bar{D}_c decreases more sharply than \bar{D}_x , thus, yielding a positive t value opposite to the predicted direction.

^aThe same format will be used in presenting the tables in the remainder of this Chapter.

Table 3-3. Summary of Findings for Competence-Credibility When Comparing \bar{D}_x and \bar{D}_c at T_3 and T_4 .

	<u>\bar{SD}</u>	<u>T_3</u>	<u>T_4</u>	<u>\bar{D}</u>	<u>t value</u>
X(N=19)	0.64	29.26	29.05	-0.21	
C(N=10)	1.84	27.10	26.30	-0.80	
				+0.59	1.21 ns

Empirical Hypotheses Three:

Mean difference scores of interpersonal attraction between T_4 and T_3 will be significantly higher for the experimental group than those for the control group.

Table 3-4 shows that t is 1.52 which is smaller than the 2.05 required for significance at $p=.05$, $df=27$. Thus, hypothesis three is rejected. It is interesting to observe that the relative strength of the t value is mostly due to the acute drop in the mean score for the control group as compared with the slighter drop observed in the experimental group.

Table 3-4. Summary of Findings for Interpersonal Attraction When Comparing \bar{D}_x and \bar{D}_c at T_3 and T_4 .

	<u>\bar{SD}</u>	<u>T_3</u>	<u>T_4</u>	<u>\bar{D}</u>	<u>t value</u>
X(N=19)	0.42	14.89	14.79	-0.10	
C(N=10)	0.92	14.60	14.10	-0.50	
				+0.40	1.52 ns

Empirical Hypotheses Four:

Mean difference scores of perceived homophily between T_4 and T_3 will be significantly higher for the experimental group than those for the control group.

Table 3-5 shows that t is 2.29 which is greater than the 2.05 required for significance at $p=.05$, $df=27$. Thus, hypothesis four is not rejected. This result, although significant in the predicted direction, should be cautiously accepted since perceived homophily was measured only with one item. Thus, the measurement is probably unreliable.

Table 3-5. Summary of Findings for Perceived Homophily When Comparing \bar{D}_x and \bar{D}_c at T_3 and T_4 .

	<u>$\bar{S}\bar{D}$</u>	<u>T_3</u>	<u>T_4</u>	<u>\bar{D}</u>	<u>t value</u>
X(N=19)	0.26	2.58	2.68	0.10	
C(N=10)	0.10	2.50	2.40	-0.10	
				+0.20	2.29*

* $p= .05$, $df=27$

The Exploratory Phase

Besides the systematic analysis presented previously, and given the very recent and tentative formalization of the field of taboo communication, it was thought that an effort should be made to explore the effect of taboo communication on a number of variables.

1. Nonverbal Patterns of Response: The possibility of the existence of certain nonverbal patterns of behavior especially designed to regulate intimacy levels in interpersonal relationships is intriguing. Since there

are no theoretical bases to formulate any kind of predictions, it was decided to unobtrusively videotape the subject-confederate interaction when the taboo communication occurred, and then, on the basis of the video tapes, develop a coding scheme that would provide the first rough approximation in the search for nonverbal patterns of response to taboo communication.

Unfortunately, the lack of control on the timing for the delivery of the stimulus (taboo message) as well as some other problems of control (e.g., some of the subjects were chewing gum) made it very difficult to reliably code the interaction. Nevertheless, preliminary analysis of the tapes show some traces of recognizable nonverbal pattern following taboo communication. This pattern consists in the momentary freezing of facial gestures and increased eye contact, followed by a greater usage of adaptors* such as scratching different parts of the body, wiping the eyes, caressing the hair, etc., and finally, changes in body posture.

2. Reciprocated Disclosure: The finding that individuals tend to follow patterns of behavior set by the person with whom they are interacting, is consistent throughout the interpersonal attraction literature. Jourard (1971) notes that "disclosure begets disclosure," Homans (1950) speaks of "distributive justice," Gouldner (1960) reports that individuals reciprocate liking, etc. Following this line of thinking, it was thought that taboo communication might also foster or enhance reciprocated taboo communication. Accordingly, the following two questions were asked to the subjects in the questionnaire administered after each session:

*Adaptors are nonverbal markers which originated in the satisfaction of self needs. Over time, however, they become part of the individual's habit repertoire. In social situations, adaptors are triggered under circumstances of stress or anxiety (c.f., Harrison, Forthcoming).

1. "I felt the other person made himself known to me."
2. "I felt I made myself known to the other person."

The mean scores for question 1 were $\bar{X}_{T_4} = 3.79$ and $\bar{X}_{T_4} = 3.52$, yielding a positive difference score of $\bar{D} = 0.26$. Further, the results for question 2 showed a decrease in the mean values from $\bar{X}_{T_3} = 3.89$ to $\bar{X}_{T_4} = 3.79$, thus yielding a negative difference of $\bar{D} = -0.10$.

In other words, while the subjects did perceive the confederate as being more disclosing after the taboo information was released, they did not perceive themselves as being more disclosing toward him. Thus, we conclude that the expected reciprocity of disclosure did not occur.

Chapter IV

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The objectives of this thesis were:

(1) To study the effects of taboo communication on interpersonal relationships, along four main dimensions: Safety-credibility, competence-credibility, perceived homophily, and interpersonal attraction.

(2) To explore the nature of possible relationships between taboo communication and (a) nonverbal patterns of response, (b) reciprocated disclosure.

Taboo communication is that category of message transfer in which the messages are perceived as extremely private and personal in nature because they deal with socially proscribed behavior or because the transfer of such messages is socially inappropriate. Because there are social sanctions normally associated with taboo communication, we assume that antecedents of taboo communication are either:

1. Ignorance of the taboo nature of the communication; lack of social graces; intent to "shock" or offend.
2. A belief by the communicator that his message will not be construed as any of the above, but will be accepted as honest information about himself.

Since the latter form of taboo communication may be seen as typically disclosed only to friends, it indicates to the receiver that he is liked and trusted by the source. Hence, such communication may be assumed to be a

reward for the receiver.

Further, Homan's notion of "distributive justice" (1961) and Jourard's "dyadic effect" (1971) lend support to the hypothesis that such rewards are likely to be returned. In Homan's words, "...outcomes exchanged will tend to be of comparable value."

In the present study, it was hypothesized that sources disclosing taboo information would be perceived as more trustworthy, less competent, more homophilous, and better liked. Further, considering the high saliency of taboo messages, these effects were expected to be maintained over time.

In order to test these hypotheses, the following experiment was conducted: Each of 29 female subjects interacted with a male confederate for a series of five meetings over a 2-1/2 period. Each of these meetings lasted approximately twelve minutes. Nineteen of the subjects were randomly assigned to the experimental treatment, in which during the fourth session, the confederate disclosed that he was an ex-convict. The remaining ten subjects were assigned to the control group which did not receive any taboo information in any of the sessions. The dependent variables were measured with questionnaires filled out by the subjects at the end of each session.

Statistically significant ($p=.05$) results (see Table 4-1) were found concerning the predicted immediate effects of taboo communication of safety-credibility and perceived homophily. However, it is likely that these significant relationships were not due to exposure to taboo communication but to methodological artifacts. The hypotheses concerning competence-credibility and interpersonal attraction were not supported.

Table 4-1. Summary of Findings for All Dependent Variables.

		Dependent Variables			
		Safety-Credibility	Competence-Credibility	Interpersonal Attraction	Perceived Homophily
Mean Difference Scores for experimental group ($\bar{X}T_4 - \bar{X}T_3$)	$\bar{D}_x(N=19)$	-0.00	-0.21	-0.10	0.10
Mean Difference Scores for control group ($\bar{X}T_4 - \bar{X}T_3$)	$\bar{D}_c(N=10)$	-1.20	-0.80	-0.50	-0.10
	t values	2.14*	1.21 ns	1.52 ns	2.29*

* $p < .05$, $df=27$.

As for the exploratory part of the study, some traces of a recognizable nonverbal pattern of response to taboo communication was observed. This pattern consisted in the momentary freezing of facial gestures and increased eye contact, followed by an increase in adaptors and, finally, changes in body posture. In regard to the question of reciprocity in taboo communication, no positive results were obtained, at least under the circumstances of the present study.

Discussion

The data presented in Chapter III imply that only one of the predicted increases in the dependent variables occurred (Perceived homophily), and even in this case, the increase was so small that it only reached significance when coupled to a simultaneous decrease in the control group. In

regard to the other variables, interpersonal attraction as well as competence-credibility decreased, while safety-credibility stayed constant.

These relative decrements of all dependent variables could be interpreted in the light of Newcomb's findings on interpersonal attraction. Newcomb (1961) explains a similar decrement in roommate attractions by suggesting that initial estimates of attraction are autistic. That is, because of a need or desire to be compatible in a roommate situation, individuals tend initially to over-estimate the favorableness of the relationship. These overestimations are later modified by reality, causing a decrease in estimates of attraction. This same argument could be extended to the present study where the desire to please the experimenter, the initial strain of being in an experimental situation, the outgoing personality of the confederate, etc. are possible factors contributing to an initial overestimation of the confederate's credibility and attraction.

Some other factors are also believed to have contributed to the failure to find more significant results. First, there were procedural limitations such as the discovery by some of the subjects that the confederate was interacting with some other person besides them. The effects of such discovery upon the subjects' perceptions of the confederate are uncertain. Though it might have been advisable to discard the subjects who discovered the presence of the confederate, such deletion was not very feasible taking into account the small number of subjects participating in the experiment.

This discussion leads us into the next shortcoming of the present research, namely the sample size. The reason for the small size of the present study was the impossibility of the confederate to interact with a larger number of people. To introduce a second confederate not only repre-

sented a serious threat to experimental controls but also--in very pragmatic terms--it represented the difficulty of finding another individual willing to invest at least five hours a day, to obtain a limited academic reward.

A more viable alternative to solve the problem of sample size was the use of films or videotapes as stimulus material. However, the usage of mechanical devices would increase the artificiality of the experiment and would take away the value of having an actual relationship being developed.

The small sample size is also likely to account to a greater extent for the instability of the means yielded by the control group.

The cost of having "real" interactions in the experiment was high. Besides the small sample size, the research also suffered from a lack of control on the information exchanged during the interactions. Although, as indicated in Chapter II, such information exchange was kept as identical as possible across subjects, differences in patterns of interaction indeed occurred and might have introduced considerable amounts of uncontrolled variance.*

Further, the small sample size not only made it more difficult to reach statistically significant findings, but also did not permit control for personality variables such as tendency toward openness. And it is likely that such variables might substantially determine the individual's reaction toward taboo communication (see Chapter I).

A factor in connection with the strength of the taboo information is perhaps in order. Although subjects and confederate interacted for a total time of almost one hour over the five sessions, the taboo information de-

*In fact, even the introduction of other taboo messages than the experimental treatment might have occurred.

livered to the subjects in the experimental group was usually discussed less than 10 seconds (except for a couple of subjects who discussed it for about two minutes). Further, it should be remembered that the degree of tabooeness of the message "I am an ex-convict" was necessarily moderate (see Chapter II).

To further complicate the problem, there is the possibility that subjects might have been reacting not only toward the taboo information but also toward the confederate's stated desire of becoming a Ph.D. and a faculty professor. The interaction between the two topics might have caused a state of imbalance in the subjects, thus lowering the rewarding value of taboo communication theoretically assumed. Partial support for this contention is shown in the responses to the exploratory questionnaire, presented in Chapter II.

Another problem which can not be easily dismissed involves the circumstances under which the messages were given. The videotape, made possible to observe how the variability of moods of the confederate, the receptiveness of the subject, the flow of the conversation, etc., influenced the way in which the taboo message was released. Disclosures across subjects varied in intensity, degree of emotion exhibited, speed, tone of voice, etc., possibly introducing unexpected amounts of variance.

This discussion leads to the conclusion that biases introduced by the confederate's behavior might also be another source of uncontrolled variance. For instance, it was found that the confederate's liking toward the subjects probably affected the evaluations of those subjects towards him. This relationship was checked as follows: At the end of the fifth session, the confederate was asked to fill out a questionnaire with the same format as

those administered to the subjects. Then, an interpersonal attraction index was computed. This index was then correlated with the subjects' index of interpersonal attraction at time 5. The correlation coefficient obtained was $p=0.47$. This moderately high correlation which accounts for 22 percent of the variance, may indicate that the confederate's liking for the subjects influenced, to a certain extent, the interpersonal attraction results obtained from the subjects.

Still another shortcoming that hindered the reliability of our results was the multiple administration of the same measurement instruments thus creating problems of sensitization that might be responsible for the small amounts of change of the dependent variables. The rationale here is that the subjects may have tried to be consistent with previous responses. For instance, the results in all dependent variables show a narrow range of responses.

Finally, it should be made explicit that the situational factors in the present study are important. The findings are limited to situations in which people have a very limited knowledge of one another, and to male-female interactions. Variables such as length of acquaintance, status, or attractiveness of the source, to name a few, should be important in determining reactions to taboo communication.

Suggestions for Future Research

In the introduction for his book Taboo Topics, Farberow (1963) states: "When taboos continue or develop without useful society-enriching functions or facilitate self-defeating or self-destructive activities, questions should be raised about them." Taboos exist in every culture or society and it is

unfortunate that so little work* has been done to understand the communication processes underlying such phenomenon.

The first step in future study should be the development of a valid and reliable scale to measure degrees of tabooess for a number of topics. Of course, the development of such a scale represents a challenge, given the basically cultural nature of taboos. Therefore, extensive testing should be done not only for different populations within a given culture but also cross-cultural validation should be conducted. The lack of such a scaling instrument will hamper the development of operationalizations and stimulus material in future research.

Another area of needed research is the study of the effects of taboo communication upon the morphological and interactional characteristics of communication networks, such as their stability, size, endurance, integration, and openness. This research is particularly important since networks are the basic structure upon which social change takes place.

A third intriguing area of research is that concerning possible relationships between taboo communication and nonverbal behavior. It might be interesting to systematically explore (1) the nonverbal patterns of response to taboo communication, (2) the nonverbal patterns followed by people in order to "draw" some form of taboo communication. For instance, Rogers (1972c) suggests that "receivers who are perceived as (a) trustworthy, (b) competent (to understand), (c) neutral (that is, who do not sanction or disapprove), and (d) confidential, will be more likely to 'draw' taboo com-

*Possible reasons for such lack of knowledge are: (1) the difficulty involved in the gathering of the data about taboo areas (Rogers, 1972c); (2) the fear that an interest in taboo topics would blight the professional careers of the investigators (Farberow, 1963).

munication messages."

Finally, other areas of inquiry are the effects of taboo communication on: (1) frequency of communication, (2) diffusion of innovations, (3) persuasion, and (4) usage of interpersonal and mass media channels.

Implications for the Practice of Communication

Despite the generally negative empirical results reported in this thesis, on the basis of the theoretical discussion about taboo communication, several implications for the practice of communication follow.

At an individual level, it appears that concealment about taboo topics such as sex, body, etc., is negatively related to mental health (Jourard, 1971; Eagan, 1970). Although this statement is also supported when referring to relatively non-taboo topics, it seems that the higher the degree of tabooeness of the concealed information, the higher the degree of tension, anxiety, and maladjustment of the individual.

Some forms of taboo communication such as self-disclosure may be regarded as one means of establishing a bond between two people in which higher levels of intimacy are likely to be more rewarding and functional than low levels (Newcomb, 1956).

At a group level, the sharing of taboo information among the members of a group can be a good strategy to increase the group's cohesion (Siemmel, 1950), and elicit increased feelings of pertenance and identification with the group (Eagan, 1970).

Finally, in a society, increased levels of communication about taboo topics can help to reduce the "tabooeness" of such topics, thus speeding the processes of certain kinds of social change.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

TEXT OF THE TAPE RECORDED INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN TO THE SUBJECTS

First of all I would like to remind you that you are participating in an interpersonal communication study, in which we are trying to explore how relationships among people develop over time.

Your partner has been randomly selected to interact with you during five sessions.

Your task today will be divided into two parts. First, you will be talking to each other for approximately 12 minutes. After that, you will be taken to another room where you will be asked to fill out a questionnaire.

We encourage you to interact with your partner as NATURALLY AND HONESTLY as you can, so the results obtained from you will be truthful and valid.

A final comment. Please DO NOT TALK about this study to anybody else. Your cooperation in this regard will be highly appreciated.

Now, before the experimenter leaves the room, do you have any questions?

APPENDIX B

STUDY ON INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

QUESTIONNAIRE

Introduction:

You have just finished the first part of today's session. For the second and last part, we would like you to answer to the questions presented in the following pages.

This questionnaire is divided into 3 parts. Each one of the parts contains its own set of instructions. Please READ CAREFULLY the instructions for each part before you answer it, so you know how to answer the questions for that part. If you have any questions concerning those instructions, ask the experimenter to clarify them.

Since ALL of the questions we are asking you deal with your perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, etc., there are no "right" or "wrong" answers. Therefore, answer them as honestly as you can. REMEMBER: your honesty is the only guarantee we have to insure the validity of your results.

Answer all the questions. DO NOT leave blank spaces. If you are not positive about how you want to answer a certain question, (because the categories we provide do not fit your perceptions, or for any other reason) mark down the BEST APPROXIMATION to your actual feelings.

Finally, remember that your answers are strictly confidential and will not be misused in any way. Now, turn the page and begin working.

PART 2

In this part of the questionnaire, you will be presented with a series of statements about your experiences with the person you just met.

For each sentence, respond by writing in front of it the appropriate category of the key:

e.g. I felt at ease N

key: SA--if you strongly agree with the statement
 A--if you agree with the statement
 N--if you neither agree nor disagree
 D--if you disagree with the statement
 SD--if you strongly disagree with the statement

1. I was attracted by the other person
2. I disliked the other person
3. I wouldn't want to interact with the other person again
4. I would like to have the other person as a friend
5. I felt the other person was like me
6. I felt the other person made himself known to me
7. I felt I made myself known to the other person

Now, in the following line, please assign a number from 1 to 100 to indicate how much you liked your partner: _____. Assuming that you are available to date your partner, assign a number from 1 to 100 to signify your willingness to accept a date: _____.

Open ended question: What do you consider to be the most valuable information your partner gave you today: _____

FINAL PART

L. How intimate or personal do you think it is the following information that your partner gave you: _____

EXTREMELY PRIVATE
AND PERSONAL

NOT INTIMATE OR
PERSONAL AT ALL

2. Now, please think back very carefully to the moment when he gave you that information; how did you feel?

3. Do you think the disclosure of that information changed your image of him?

NO ☐

YES ☐

if yes, HOW:

4. After your partner's disclosure, do you think you changed your own disclosure (openness toward him).

NO ☐

YES ☐

if yes,

VERY MUCH ☐ SOMEWHAT ☐

LITTLE ☐ NOT AT ALL ☐

5. Did you feel trusted because of your partner's disclosure?

NOT TRUSTED
AT ALL

VERY MUCH
TRUSTED

6. Did you trust your partner after his disclosure?

VERY MUCH SO

NOT AT ALL

APPENDIX C

FIVE FACTOR ROTATION SOLUTION:
ROTATED FACTOR LOADINGS^a (N=29).

Item ^b	Factor Loading					
	F ₁	F ₂	F ₃	F ₄	F ₅	h ²
¹ SAFE-UNSAFE	(539)	-373	<u>605*</u>	234	089	859
² JUST-UNJUST	(225)	059	<u>837*</u>	133	208	817
³ KIND-CRUEL	(329)	-203	<u>810*</u>	186	261	909
⁴ FRIENDLY-UNFRIENDLY	(464)	-083	<u>749*</u>	209	238	885
⁵ HONEST-DISHONEST	(446)	-174	<u>756*</u>	170	191	867
⁶ TRAINED-UNTRAINED	<u>870*</u>	-098	(315)	148	234	945
⁷ EXPERIENCED-UNEXPERIENCED	(497)	-302	626*	038	277	809
⁸ SKILLED-UNSKILLED	<u>829*</u>	-061	(364)	186	271	932
⁹ QUALIFIED-UNQUALIFIED	<u>684*</u>	-135	(593)	038	237	897
¹⁰ INFORMED-UNINFORMED	<u>726*</u>	-109	(492)	132	314	898
¹¹ I was attracted by the other person	040	-714*	360	(374)	<u>291</u>	867
¹² I liked the other person	287	-307	(385)	362	<u>623*</u>	846
¹³ I would want to interact again	145	-190	(398)	186	<u>773*</u>	850
¹⁴ I would like his friendship	(387)	-242	259	131	<u>763*</u>	876
¹⁵ I liked my partner ^c	298	(-405)	091	111	<u>769*</u>	866
¹⁶ I would like to date him ^c	131	-835*	-004	005	(458)	925
¹⁷ I felt the other person was like me	218	-162	249	853*	(275)	940
Variance Explained by the Factor	23.33%	11.45%	27.38%	7.78%	18.28%	

the underlined values represent where the prime loadings were expected.

* Prime Loadings

() Second highest loadings

^a Decimal point omitted

^b Items 1-5 correspond to safety-credibility; 6-10 to competence-credibility; 11-16 to interpersonal attraction; and 17, to perceived homophily.

^c It should be noted that although these two items were factor-analyzed, they were not included in the index of interpersonal attraction; rather, they were separately analyzed in the exploratory part of the study.

APPENDIX D

MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS (N=29).

<u>Item</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>S.D.</u>
¹ SAFE-UNSAFE	5.68	1.25
² JUST-UNJUST	5.41	1.61
³ KIND-CRUEL	5.62	1.29
⁴ FRIENDLY-UNFRIENDLY	5.96	1.20
⁵ HONEST-DISHONEST	5.65	1.34
⁶ TRAINED-UNTRAINED	5.55	1.35
⁷ EXPERIENCED-UNEXPERIENCED	5.62	1.32
⁸ SKILLED-UNSKILLED	5.62	1.32
⁹ QUALIFIED-UNQUALIFIED	5.51	1.29
¹⁰ INFORMED-UNINFORMED	5.79	1.44
¹¹ I was attracted by the other person	3.03	.86
¹² I liked the other person	3.96	.77
¹³ I would want to interact again	3.75	.78
¹⁴ I would like his friendship	3.79	.97
¹⁵ I liked my partner	67.37	22.71
¹⁶ I would like to date him	38.93	28.30
¹⁷ I felt the other person was like me	3.72	.84

APPENDIX E
INTERCORRELATION MATRIX* (N=29)

Item**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	1000									
2	663	1000								
3	760	744	1000							
4	838	720	904	1000						
5	822	792	846	849	1000					
6	756	546	634	711	737	1000				
7	722	595	874	841	748	681	1000			
8	744	578	686	751	708	941	733	1000		
9	780	677	822	807	822	848	826	847	1000	
10	767	724	738	790	787	881	779	891	856	1000
11	601	398	586	444	502	380	511	418	428	433
12	645	494	696	681	671	595	647	647	654	658
13	536	531	609	591	560	533	562	562	546	581
14	556	463	642	597	569	629	684	656	621	674
15	496	306	475	484	472	495	525	489	506	563
16	401	128	315	229	308	302	441	264	294	362
17	524	429	557	552	513	452	481	481	429	508

*Decimal point omitted

**These item numbers correspond to those presented for Appendix C, and D.

INTERCORRELATION MATRIX (continued)

Item	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
11	1000						
12	691	1000					
13	642	802	1000				
14	557	741	769	1000			
15	544	756	689	819	1000		
16	676	552	519	593	728	1000	
17	553	639	489	536	484	335	1000

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