

SIDNEY M. JOURARD

# THE TRANSPARENT SELF



REVISED EDITION

Revised Edition

**SIDNEY M. JOURARD**

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# THE TRANSPARENT SELF



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## Preface to Second Edition

For nearly two centuries, the image of the melting pot served as a symbol of the United States. Newcomers were welcomed to this land of opportunity, but their heritage was melted away in the fires of the socialization process, to produce *homo Americanensis*. The "American" conquered the wildness, decimated the Indians, and is now in speedy course toward devastating natural resources, and the perspectives of other nations. It is time to replace the image of the melting pot with another metaphor—perhaps *mosaic* is apt. It is time for melting-pot America to become mosaic America, where myriad perspectives and ways to live are welcomed as part of the human drama, not suppressed as "unpatriotic."

## vi PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

If America and, indeed, the Western world, become “pluralistic” societies, then they will indeed be places suitable for “transparent selves.” I dedicate this new edition of *The Transparent Self* to the passionate and, I hope, unbloody quest for social structures in which all who are of goodwill can live in harmony and mutual confirmation.

I have eliminated several chapters of the first edition from this revision because they seemed redundant. In their place, I added several which represent extensions of ideas first developed in the original edition, but which appear to fit with the overall aims of the book.

I want to thank Anne Morgan Nunez and Anne Taylor, both former students of mine and readers of the first edition, for helping me cut awkward phrasing wherever they found it. I did not follow their suggestions in all cases.

Sidney M. Jourard

Gainesville, Florida  
1971

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## Preface to First Edition

A choice that confronts every one at every moment is this: Shall we permit our fellows to know us as we now are, or shall we remain enigmas, wishing to be seen as persons we are not?

This choice has always been available, but throughout history we have chosen to conceal our authentic being behind masks. We assume the *other* man is hiding or misrepresenting his real feelings, his intentions, or his past because we generally do so ourselves. We take it for granted that when a man speaks about himself, he is telling more or less than the unvarnished truth.

We camouflage our true being before others to protect ourselves against criticism or rejection. This protection comes at a steep price. When we are not truly known by the other people

in our lives, we are misunderstood. When we are misunderstood, especially by family and friends, we join the "lonely crowd."<sup>\*99</sup> Worse, when we succeed in hiding our being from others, we tend to lose touch with our real selves. This loss of self contributes to illness in its myriad forms.

It is curious that we psychologists have not seriously questioned man's *decision* to hide rather than to reveal himself. Indeed, self-concealment is regarded as the most natural state for grown men. People who reveal themselves in simple honesty are seen as childish or crazy, as was Billy Budd, in Melville's novel, or Prince Mishkin in Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*. The assumption that concealment is a more natural state for man than candor has given rise to many stratagems for getting inside a man's defenses. These run the gamut from attempting to get a man drunk, to asking him to report his dreams or to tell what he sees in some inkblots. Here, the assumption is that he will then, in spite of himself, give hints of what he has been hiding.

Yet, our research shows that such methods of getting a person to "open up" are unnecessary when he wants to be known. At such times he will do everything in his power to make sure the other person's image of him is accurate. He will show the same concern to be known that a less honest person will to ensure the other has a false picture of him.

I became fascinated with self-disclosure after puzzling about the fact that patients who consulted me for therapy told me more about themselves than they had ever told another living person. Many of them said, "You are the first person I have ever been completely honest with." I wondered whether there was some connection between their reluctance to be known by spouse, family, and friends and their need to consult with a professional psychotherapist. My fascination with self-disclosure led to a conceptual and empirical odyssey, some aspects of which are described in the chapters that follow.

Another phenomenon, not completely separable from self-dis-

\*The superscript numbers throughout the text refer to the numbered references in the bibliography.

closure, is *spirit*. There is increasing scientific evidence that man's physical and psychological health are profoundly affected by the degree to which he has found meaning, direction, and purpose in his existence. Some of this purpose and meaning arises in man's relationships with his fellows. I suspect a man's life begins to lose meaning most rapidly when he becomes estranged from his fellows; when he distrusts others so much he misleads them into thinking they know him when, in fact, he knows that they do not and cannot. "Spirit" is a term which scientists view with suspicion as a matter which does not lend itself to scientific study. Yet there is more to man than the structures and drives he shares with animals. Consequently, I have taken a fresh look at whatever there is that can be seen when the layman or poet speaks of spirit, and I have attempted to bring these phenomena within the scope of scientific analysis. Part of this book shows the result of my thinking in this area.

The book as a whole explores the hypothesis that man can attain to health and fullest personal development only insofar as he gains courage to be himself with others and when he finds goals that have meaning for him—including the reshaping of society so it is fit for all to live and grow in. I would like this book to be read by research psychologists, counselors and psychotherapists, ministers, nurses, and health scientists, as well as by students of mental health. And, of course, I welcome the attention of interested laymen who wish to become acquainted with recent thinking in a field that touches upon their potential for fuller functioning as human beings.

Sidney M. Jourard

Gainesville, Florida  
1964



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## Acknowledgments

Parts of this book have appeared in the following journals: *Voices: The Art and Science of Psychotherapy* (Chapters 2 and 18); *Mental Hygiene* (Chapter 3); *Journal of Existential Psychiatry* (Chapters 4 and 10); *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* (Chapter 5); *Law and Contemporary Problems* (Chapter 8); *Journal of Individual Psychology* (Chapter 16); *American Journal of Nursing* (Chapters 20, 21, and 22). These articles are reproduced here with permission from the respective editors.

Chapter 11 appeared first in E. Shneidman (ed.), *On the Nature of Suicide* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1969). Chapter 12 was first published as a chapter in H. A. Otto (ed.), *The Family in Search of a Future* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts,

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1970). Chapter 19 will also be published in L. Blank, M. Gottsegen, and Gloria Gottsegen (eds.), *Confrontation: Encounters in Self and Interpersonal Awareness* (New York: Collier-Macmillan, 1971). These chapters are reproduced here with the permission of the publishers.

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# PART 1

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## **INTRODUCTION**

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# 1

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## **Self-Disclosure and the Mysterious Other**

I see my fellow man doing all manner of things, and I have no way of predicting or understanding why he does what he does. In fact, I may fear him, as I fear anything which acts with caprice. I may impute motives like mine to him, as primitive man imputed human motives to animals, the sea, plants, and the weather. I may engage in magic or ritual, as primitive men did, to get others to help me or leave me alone.

When man learned the conditions which were responsible for the behavior of the weather, the sea, plants, and animals, he feared them less and became more able to enlist their collaboration for the pursuit of his ends. He no longer imputed characteristics to these things which they did not possess, but strove, rather, to

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ascertain their real characteristics and to understand the forces which moved them. Man's fear changed then to respect.

With his fellow, however, man continues to behave as he did in earlier times with plants, animals, and elements. His beliefs about the other man are usually based on insufficient evidence, and they are thus often false. Consequently, a man may find himself living fearfully in a world of strangers whose actions are not understood.

The other man is a mystery. He is opaque. We cannot know in advance what he will do. We do not know his past, and we do not know what is "going on inside him." We remain on guard when we are in his presence.

The other man behaves predictably some of the time in the ritual of living. He clothes himself, goes to work, tips his hat to ladies, utters polite conversation, and in short, seems "normal"—unless he is a foreigner, a psychotic, a "hippie," or a child. In the latter instances, we may admit we don't know what he is thinking, and even if he tells us, we may not understand because we don't know his language. Or, erroneously, we may assume that we know his motives, thoughts, and reactions.

Even if "normal" people tell us what they are thinking, what they feel, believe, or daydream about, many of us feel we are being "snowed"—the man isn't leveling with us. Often, he is doing just that. We are shocked when we read that Mr. Jones, without warning, took a hatchet and butchered his family, whom he seemed to love so well.

*Things are seldom what they seem,  
Skim milk masquerades as cream.  
Externals don't portray insides,  
Jekylls may be masking Hydes.*

Let me apologize for such atrocious verse and then point up a fact. Man, perhaps alone of all living forms, is capable of *being* one thing and *seeming* from his actions and talk to be something else. Not even animals and insects and fishes which Nature ex-



pertly camouflages can do this “seeming” at will; they do it by reflex.

If Mr. Jones had *frankly* disclosed his feelings and plans to you, then news of his butchery would have come as no surprise. You would have understood it. Perhaps you could have predicted it and interfered, thus saving the lives of his “loved ones.”

When a man discloses his experience to another, fully, spontaneously, and honestly, then the mystery that he was decreases enormously. When a man discloses himself to me, my preconceptions about him are altered by the facts as they come forth—unless, of course, I have a vested interest in continuing to believe untruths about him.

In the general scheme of things, what consequences follow when men disclose their real selves, one to the other? Here are some of the obvious outcomes:

—They learn the extent to which they are similar, one to the other, and the extent to which they differ from one another in thoughts, feelings, hopes, reactions to the past, etc.

—They learn of the other man’s needs, enabling them to help him or to ensure that his needs will not be met.

—They learn the extent to which this man accords with or deviates from moral and ethical standards.

Why do we disclose ourselves, and why do we not? Answers to this question are of enormous importance, since mutual ignorance seems to be at the root of all problems between family members or between citizens of different nations.

Researches I have conducted<sup>51, 57</sup> show that a person will permit himself to be known when he believes his audience is a man of goodwill. Self-disclosure follows an attitude of love and trust. If I love someone, not only do I strive to know him; I *also display my love by letting him know me*. At the same time, by so doing, I permit him to love me.

Loving is scary, because when you permit yourself to be known, you expose yourself not only to a lover’s balm, but also to a hater’s bombs! When he knows you, he knows just where to plant them for maximum effect.