

Social Psychology Lecture 2: Sex, Attraction, & Relationships

Who do you like?

5 factors involved in liking. Each factor may influence our thoughts or feelings toward a person.

1. Similarity
2. Proximity
3. Self-disclosure
4. Situational factors
5. Physical attractiveness

Similarity: friends and romantic partners tend to be similar in beliefs and other qualities such as attractiveness and intelligence. Social validation and easier communication comes from being with someone similar to you.

- Opposite attract is not supported by research.

Propinquity/Proximity: we tend to like people that we encounter more often.

- MIT study: more friendships between neighbors.
- Police Academy study: more friendships between trainees whose names were close alphabetically because dorms and classes were arranged by last name.
- Manhattan housing study: 88% of "friends" lived in the same building.

Self-Disclosure: providing information about ourselves to another person.

- Disclosure-liking effect: people who disclose are liked more, we disclose more to people we like, and we like people more after disclosing to them.
- Disclosing builds familiarity and trust. Intimate information about others is valued and rare.

Situational factors: creating and maintaining feelings of liking can be influenced by situational factors. Shared positive emotional experiences help build friendships. Situational factors influence proximity and promote feelings of similarity.

Physical attractiveness: people who are physically attractive are generally liked more. Even by babies. What determines attractiveness?

- Symmetry: sign of physical and immune health.
- Averageness (prototypical): appearance does not deviate from norms. Many faces averaged together is more attractive than an individual face.
- Sexual differentiation: having appropriately masculine or feminine face and body.

Why do people want to have sex? A study found 237 appropriate reasons. Though some reasons are similar between men and women, they have different strategies about choosing a partner.

Evolutionary Perspectives on Sexual Attraction

- In ancestral times, any sexual activity could result in pregnancy. No birth control and no easy ways to get food. Because the risk of pregnancy has different risks for men and women, they have evolved different preferences in what they find attractive in a partner.
- Sperm is cheap: Minimal Parental Investment of a male is truly minimal. Sperm is just a moving genetic material.
- Eggs are valuable. They contain the machinery of life. Biologically more costly. Gestation period (9 months), placentation, and lactation.

Mate Selection – Gender Differences

- Women are more selective than men. Pregnancy is costly so they have to be choosy.
- Men desire a greater number of sexual partners (men=18, women=6). Men use pornography and prostitutes more.
- Maximum reproductive success (women=69 children, men=888 children).
- Homosexual preferences are typical of their gender. Men prefer more partners than females.

What people actually want:

- Men value physical attractiveness. Cross-culturally men tend to marry younger women. Youth and beauty are signs of fertility. The peak potential for women is between ages 19-35. The waist to hip ratio is associated with fertility. Males contribute minimally to the next generation but still consume large quantities of resources.
- Women value resource investment. Pregnancy is costly so they want to make sure their child survives. Men with ability, status, intelligence, skill to acquire resources, and willingness to invest are more attractive qualities. Women world wide valued male characteristic linked to resource potential (good financial prospects, ambition, intelligence, older age, etc.)

From an evolutionary standpoint:

- Women are often treated as sex symbols. Men value youth, health, and beauty in women. Signal reproductive potential. Women fake signals of youth and health.
- Men are often treated as success symbols. Women value status, wealth, ability, age. Signals ability to provide resources to offspring. Men fake signals of commitment and status.

Stages of Human Sexual Response

- Excitement: sexual arousal begins. Blood flow increases
- Plateau: prolonged state of arousal. Increased breathing, heart rate, and muscle tension. Skin may be flush from increased blood flow.
- Orgasm: muscle tension and blood flow reach a peak. Climax occurs resulting in intense muscle spasms. Threshold and intensity of orgasm more variable among women.
- Resolution: return to baseline. Muscles relax, breathing and heart rate return to normal. Men have a refractory period preventing more orgasms. Women have the possibility of more orgasms with continued stimulation.

Why are people gay?

- Biological factors influencing homosexuality.
- Genetic factors: no specific gay gene, but homosexuality is highly heritable.
- Hormonal influences: homosexuality is more common in men with older brothers. Mothers may develop antibodies from earlier male children that suppress testosterone in later sons. Their bodies are more masculine but their brain is feminine.
- Brain anatomy: anterior hypothalamus of gay men is more similar to that of a woman.

What is love? Factors of love (3 groups):

1. Intimacy: trust, caring, honesty, support.
2. Commitment: loyalty, devotion, sacrifice.
3. Passion: sexual excitement, physical attraction, "butterflies in stomach".

Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love: Romantic relationships composed of the 3 elements. Passion, intimacy, and commitment combined in different ways.

Investment Model of Commitment. Components of whether couples stay committed:

- Rewards: what you get from relationship.
- Costs: what you give and what they take.
- Comparison level: expected reward to cost ratio.
- Alternatives: does somebody else want you?
- Comparison level for alternatives: is this someone else better?
- Investment: how much you put in and what you would lose if the relationship ended.

How to know if you're in a bad relationship: the ration of positive to negative interactions should be at least 3 to 1 good to bad. 4 horsemen of relationship apocalypse:

- Criticism, defensiveness, and stonewalling.
- Expressions of disgust or contempt.
- Divorce can be predicted with 93% accuracy from these behaviors.

Attribution styles: relationship enhancing attributions are good acts attributed to partners personality and bad acts are attributed to external factors.

Distress-maintaining: bad acts attributed to partners personality and good acts are attributed to external factors. This continues on cycles of unhappiness and dissatisfaction.

How to stay happy in your relationship:

- Positive illusions: lie to yourself about how great they are, idealizing your partner leads to greater satisfaction, and use positive attributions to explain behavior
- Novel & arousing activities: do new stuff, keep relationship new, exciting, and playful, and take advantage of misattribution of arousal.