

Interpersonal Attraction

Kim Jinyoung

Definition: Interpersonal Attraction is a person's desire to approach another individual. Attraction is the first phase of the most voluntary relationships.

A. Main Factors of Attraction

1. Physical attraction

We would like to believe that beauty is only skin deep, and therefore, a trivial determinant of liking. Indeed, when asked what they looked for in a potential date, most people put physical attractiveness at the bottom of their list. Elaine Hatfield randomly matched incoming students at the University of Minnesota for a blind date. The students previously had been given a battery of personality tests. Intelligence, masculinity, femininity, dominance, submission, dependence, independence, sensitivity and sincerity had little effect on liking. The one determinant of whether or not a couple liked each other and actually repeated their date was their physical attractiveness.

2. Proximity

People who become friends are those who have the greatest opportunity to interact. Proximity allows you to get to know the other person better, thereby predicting their behavior better. Because of this they seem less frightening than strangers. "Mere exposure" to others leads to positive feelings about them. Exposure increases attraction when the initial interaction is favorable or neutral.

Mere Exposure Effect (Zajonc, 1968): familiarity

The experiment about the relations between attraction and exposure of picture shows the degree that the subject was exposed affects the increase of attraction.

3. Similarity

Evidence suggests we are attracted to people who are similar to ourselves. Attraction to persons very similar to yourself allows you to validate yourself as being worthy of being liked. Matching hypothesis - predicts that although you may be attracted to the most physically attractive people, you will date and mate with people who are similar to yourself in physical attractiveness.

Attitudinal similarity is especially important due to cognitive consistency. Attitude similarity, especially significant in initial attraction, seems to predict relationship success. If you have favorable attitudes toward certain objects and discover that another person has favorable attitudes toward those objects, your

cognitions will be consistent if you like that person. Similar others reinforce this opinion. We expect that similar others will approve of us - we prefer to develop friendships with those we think will evaluate us favorably. Prestige, money, power, intelligence, and various personality characteristics may compensate for a lack of physical attractiveness. The more intellectually similar people are, the more they are alike in the way they see the world and the greater their interpersonal mutual attraction.

Complementarity's an "opposites attract"; people are attracted to dissimilar others only in certain situations. Winch (1958) proposed the complementarity hypothesis, the idea that opposites attract. The research evidence is mixed at best. Generally, similarity seems a much more potent determinant of attraction than complementarity.

4. Competence

We might think that, all other things being equal, the more competent an individual is, the more we will like them. We stand a better chance of being right if we surround ourselves with highly able, highly competent people. However, studies suggest that, in problem-solving groups, the participants who are considered the most competent and to have the best ideas tend not to be the ones who are best liked. It could be that a person who has a great deal of ability makes us feel uncomfortable - the person may seem unapproachable, distant, superhuman.

There was a study done in which there were four experimental conditions. It had a person of superior ability who bungled (spilled coffee on himself); a superior person who did not bungle; a person of average ability who bungled; an average person who did not bungle. The superior person who committed a blunder was the most popular; next was the perfect person who did not blunder; then the average person who did not blunder; last was the average person who blundered. Hence, while a high degree of competence does make us appear more attractive, some evidence of fallibility increases our attractiveness still further.

5. Reciprocation

The single most powerful determinant of whether one person will like another is whether the other likes that person. Work by Hallinan and others show that when choices are not reciprocated, friendships fade. Two subjects met with each other. Researchers led some subjects to believe that the other subject liked them while others were led to believe they were disliked. In a subsequent interaction, those individuals who thought they were liked behaved in more likable ways. Moreover, subjects who believed they were liked were, in fact, liked by the other subject, while those who believed they were disliked were not liked by the other subject. Partners tended to mirror the behavior of the subjects with whom they were paired.

B. Theories of interpersonal attraction

1. Social exchange theory

Based on an economic model of profits and losses; claims that you develop relationships that enable you to maximize your profits.

Rewards – Costs = Profits

How people feel about their relationships depends on their perception of the rewards they receive from the relationship (e.g., praise) and the costs they incur (e.g., time, money, etc). When the costs are larger than rewards, people leave the relationships. When rewards equal or surpass the comparison level, you feel satisfied with the relationship

When people compute costs and rewards, they do not compute simply. They consider comparison levels. Comparison level is your realistic expectations of what you feel you deserve from a relationship. You also have a comparison level for alternatives that you compare your profits from current relationships with the ones you think you can get from alternative relationships.

2. Equity theory

Similar to social exchange but goes a step further - claims that you develop and maintain relationships in which your ration of rewards to costs is approximately equal to your partner's. People are happiest with relationships in which the rewards and costs a person experiences and contributions he or she makes to the relationship are roughly equal to the rewards, costs, and contributions of the other person. When they feel their relationships are not fair, people try to balance the relationship to be fair. Inequity leads to dissatisfaction.

Equitable Relationship

$$\frac{\text{Output of A}}{\text{Input of A}} = \frac{\text{Output of B}}{\text{Input of B}}$$

Different culture and gender feels differently about equity and need. In much of Europe, equity is unrelated to satisfaction while in the U.S. it is highly correlated. Women are more likely to engage in extramarital affairs when they perceive their relationships are inequitable.