

CHAPTER 10 OUTLINE

Introduction

The path to matrimony differs sharply by culture. In Junigau, Nepal, arranged marriages are common and the bride and groom often speak to each other for the first time on the wedding day. The divorce rate in the United States suggests that ours is not necessarily the most successful strategy.

I. What Causes Attraction

- Relationships are considered to be near the top of what makes one happy, and the absence of meaningful relationships can make people feel lonely and worthless.
- This chapter explores antecedents of attraction, initial liking, and love that develops in close relationships.

A. The Person Next Door: The Propinquity Effect

- The people who, by chance, are the ones you see and interact with the most often are the most likely to become your friends and lovers; this is known as the **propinquity effect**.
- Festinger, Schachter, and Back (1950) tracked friendship formation among couples in graduate housing; the closer together people lived, even within a building, the more likely they were to become close friends (Figure 10.1).
- The propinquity effect works because of the **mere exposure effect**, the finding that the more exposure we have to a stimulus, the more apt we are to like it (provided the stimulus is not noxious, in which case exposure leads to greater disliking).
- Moreland and Beach (1992) had confederates attend a class either 0, 5, 10, or 15 times during the term; the more visits, the more they were liked – even though the confederates did not interact with the other students (Figure 10.2).

1. Computers: Long-Distance Propinquity

Meeting people online adds a twist to the propinquity effect and researchers are beginning to study this effect.

- McKenna, Green, & Gleason (2002) had people meet either face-to-face or on the Internet. Those who met on the Internet were more attracted to each other than those who met face-to-face.
- Chan and Cheng (2004) found that offline friendships were of higher quality in friendships that had lasted less than one year. In friendships that had lasted for more than one year, the online and offline friendships were of similar quality.

B. Similarity

- Relationships may begin in *closed field situations*, where people are forced to interact with each other, and *open field situations*, where people are free to associate or not as they choose.
- *Similarity*, or the match between two people's interests, attitudes, values, backgrounds, and/or personality, fuels the development of relationships that begin based on propinquity.

1. Opinions and Personality

- Although folk wisdom suggests that *complementarity*, or attraction to opposites, prevails, the research evidence shows that similarity, not complementarity, draws people together.
- Newcomb (1961) found in a college housing study that similarity in background, attitudes, and values predicted friendship formation. People who are similar are attractive because (a) they validate our own self-worth, and (b) we assume that people who disagree with us have negative personality traits.
- Boyden et al. (1984) found strong support for personality similarity in gay men's relationships; other researchers find support for similarity in heterosexual relationships and friendships.

2. Interpersonal Style

- Similarity of communication skills and interpersonal style also increases attraction (Burleson & Samter, 1996).
- Relationships in which people do not share interpersonal communication styles are frustrating and less likely to flourish (Burleson, 1994; Duck & Pittman, 1994).

3. Interests and Experiences

- Similarity also fuels proximity by leading similar people to choose similar situations, which leads to the development of further common bonds.
- There are three reasons similarity may be so important in attraction: we expect similar others to like us and thus are more likely to initiate relationships; similar others validate our characteristics and beliefs; and we draw inferences about character based on perceived similarity.

C. Reciprocal Liking

- One of the most potent determinants of our liking someone is if we believe that that person likes us. Gold et al. (1984) showed that men greatly liked a woman who nonverbally displayed liking, even though she disagreed with them on important issues.
- If we believe somebody else likes us, we will be a more likable person in their presence; this will lead them to actually like us more—a self-fulfilling prophecy (Curtis & Miller, 1986).

- A person's level of self-esteem moderates how we are affected by other people's liking us. Swann and his colleagues have shown that people with high or moderate self-esteem like, and want to interact with, those who like them, but people with low self-esteem prefer to interact with somebody who earlier criticized them than somebody who earlier praised them.
- This pattern of reaction sets up a self-fulfilling prophecy.

D. Physical Attractiveness and Liking

- Physical attractiveness is a major determinant of liking in studies of first impressions.
- Walster Hatfield et al. (1966) conducted a classic computer dating study that randomly matched students for a blind date at a dance at freshman orientation. Of all the characteristics that could determine liking and a desire to date the person again, the major determinant was physical attractiveness.
- Debate has existed on sex differences in the importance of physical attractiveness. A meta-analysis by Feingold (1990) finds that both sexes value attractiveness, although men value it somewhat more than women; however, this difference is larger for stated attitudes and values than for actual behavior.
- Regan and Berscheid (1997) find that both sexes rate physical attractiveness as the most important characteristic determining desire of a sexual partner.
- Physical attractiveness plays a powerful role in homosexual as well as heterosexual relationships (at least among gay men).

1. What Is Attractive?

- The media bombards us with a standard of beauty, and also associates beautiful characters with morally good ones; because of the media we develop shared standards of beauty.
- For both sexes, this standard includes large eyes, prominent cheekbones, and a big smile. For women, a small nose and chin, narrow cheeks, large pupils, and high eyebrows are considered attractive; for men, a large chin is considered attractive (Cunningham, 1986; Cunningham et al., 1990).

2. Cultural Standards of Beauty

- Surprisingly, there is a large agreement across cultures in what is considered physically attractive in the human face.
- Langlois and Roggman hypothesize that this agreement may be due to evolutionary mechanisms and suggest that the attractive faces are those whose features are those that are statistically average. A test using computer composites of 16 different faces supports the hypothesis (see photographs on pg. 317).
- Average faces are not the *most* attractive; they are just more attractive than the individual faces that are averaged in the composite. Perrett et al. (1994) showed this distinction in a study in which Caucasian and Asian participants rated "highly attractive" composites of both races higher than "average attractive" composites.

3. The Power of Familiarity

- The statistically average face is typical or familiar. Berscheid and Reis (1998) suggest that it is this familiarity that is the crucial variable that explains attraction; we prefer the familiar and safe to the unfamiliar and potentially dangerous.
- Familiarity also underlies propinquity, similarity, and reciprocal liking.

4. Assumptions about Attractive People

- People assume that physical attractiveness is highly correlated with other desirable traits; this is known as the "what is beautiful is good" stereotype (Table 10.1). The beautiful are thought to be more sociable, extraverted, and socially competent than the less attractive and are also seen as more sexual, happier, and more assertive.
- The "what is beautiful is good" stereotype appears to operate across cultures; Korean students, like North Americans, agree that physically attractive people are more socially skilled, friendly, and better adjusted. However, while North American individualists believed that beautiful people were independent and self-reliant, Korean collectivists believed they had integrity and concern for others. Thus the attractive characteristics include those perceived to be attractive in the culture.
- There is a kernel of truth to the association between physical attractiveness and sociability; this may be due to a self-fulfilling prophecy. In support of this idea, Snyder, Tanke, and Berscheid (1977) showed that when men thought that the woman they were talking with over the phone was physically attractive, they acted more warmly towards her; this led her, in turn, to act warmer, more confident, and more animated. Anderson and Bem (1981) replicated the study showing the same effect for women's beliefs about men's attractiveness.
- Three meta-analyses examining the effect of attractiveness found no gender difference, indicating that physical attractiveness is as important to women as it is to men.

E. Theories of Interpersonal Attraction: Social Exchange and Equity

1. Social Exchange Theory

- **Social exchange theory** states that how people feel about a relationship depends on their perceptions of the *rewards* and *costs* of the relationship, the kind of relationship they believe they deserve or expect to have (their **comparison level**), and their chances for having a better relationship with someone else (their **comparison level for alternatives**).
- The outcome of a relationship is its rewards minus its costs. How satisfied one is with this outcome depends on one's comparison level, and how likely one is to stay in an unsatisfactory relationship is determined by the comparison level for alternatives.
- Generally the research evidence supports the theory.

2. Equity Theory

- **Equity theory** argues that people are happiest with relationships in which the rewards and costs a person experiences and the contributions he or she makes to the relationship are roughly equal to the rewards, costs, and contributions of the other person. According to the theory, both under- and over-benefited partners should be motivated to restore equity, although research finds that this is truer for the under-benefited.

II. Close Relationships

- Until recently, there was little research in social psychology on enduring relationships because they are more difficult to study scientifically: random assignment is impossible, and feelings can be hard to measure.

A. Defining Love

- There seem to be multiple kinds of love; different scales to measure these have been developed in the past decade.

1. Companionate versus Passionate Love

- **Companionate love** is the feeling of intimacy and affection we feel for another person when we care deeply for the person but do not necessarily experience passion or arousal in his or her presence.
- **Passionate love** is the feeling of intense longing, accompanied by physiological arousal, we feel for another person; when our love is reciprocated we feel great fulfillment and ecstasy, but when it is not we feel sadness and despair.
- Cross-cultural research indicates that Americans value passionate over companionate love, while Chinese do the reverse; the Taita of East Africa value both equally. Jankowiak and Fischer (1992) found evidence for passionate love in 147 societies (see Table 10.2).

B. Culture and Love

- Culture plays a role in how people label their experiences and what they expect from them.
- For example, the Japanese concept of *amae* (a very positive emotional state in which one is a totally passive love object cared for by the romantic partner) has no equivalent in English; the Chinese concept of *gan qing* includes practical love and help as romantic; and the Korean concept of *jung* expresses the tie developed over time and experience that binds two people together in either positive or negative relationships.
- Shaver et al. (1992) found both similarities and differences in concepts of love cross-culturally in a concept-sorting task; for example, Chinese have many love concepts that are also sad.
- Similarly, Rothbaum and Tsang (1998) examined the lyrics of popular love songs in the U.S. and China and found that Chinese love songs had significantly more references to suffering, based on Chinese culture's belief in predestination of interpersonal relationships (*yuan*); however, Chinese love songs were as passionate and erotic as American ones.
- Dion and Dion (1988, 1993) suggest that romantic love is an important basis for marriage in individualistic societies but is less valued in collectivist ones, where the wishes of family and other group members count more.
- Levine et al. (1995) found that marrying for love was most important to Western and Westernized participants and of least importance to participants in less developed Eastern countries.
- Thus, while romantic love may be nearly universal across cultures, different rules alter how that state is experienced and expressed.

III. Love and Relationships

- This section examines how the factors examined in relationship formation play out over time.

A. Evolution and Love: Choosing a Mate

- Evolutionary biology judges an animal's "fitness" in terms of its reproductive success; the **evolutionary approach to love** states that men and women are attracted to different characteristics in each other: men are attracted by women's appearance; women are attracted by men's resources—because these foster reproductive success.
- Buss and his colleagues suggest that this approach explains the different strategies of men and women in romantic relationships. Data that is supportive comes from cross-cultural studies of preferences in relationships and from findings that men are more upset by sexual infidelity and women by emotional infidelity. Gangestad and Buss (1993) show that physical attractiveness (possibly associated with health) is especially valued in regions of the world where disease is common. However, this preference existed for both sexes, supporting the evolutionary perspective in general but questioning the proposed gender differences.
- Criticisms of the theory are that some aspects of it are untestable; that it is an oversimplification (particularly with regard to gender differences in the preference for physical attractiveness), and that data on gender differences in the importance of physical attractiveness and of economic resources provide only mixed support. Finally, some researchers believe that findings can be explained by the fact that around the world, women have fewer resources than men do. In support of this latter interpretation, Gangestad (1993) found an association between women's economic resources and their preference for a physically attractive man.

B. Attachment Styles in Intimate Relationships

- The **attachment styles** approach (based on the work of Bowlby and Ainsworth) to close relationships focuses on the expectations people develop about relationships based on the relationship they had with their primary caregiver when they were infants. The theory suggests that these influence the kinds of relationships we have as adults.
- The **secure attachment style** develops in those who have responsive caregivers as infants and is characterized by trust, a lack of concern with being abandoned, and the view that one is worthy and well-liked. The **avoidant attachment style** develops in those who have aloof and distant caregivers as infants and is characterized by a suppression of attachment needs because attempts to be intimate have been rebuffed; people with this style find it difficult to develop intimate relationships; the **anxious/ambivalent attachment style** develops in those who had inconsistent and overbearing caregivers as infants and is characterized by a concern that others will not reciprocate one's desire for intimacy, resulting in higher than average levels of anxiety.
- The key assumption of the theory is that the attachment style we learn as infants becomes our schema for relationships and generalizes to all of our relationships with others.
- Hazen and Shaver (1987) asked people to select one of three overall descriptors of attachment style (presented in Table 10.3); their selection was related to the quality of their romantic relationships. This and other data connecting people's reports of relationships with their parents to reports of romantic relationships are consistent with attachment theory.
- Collins and Feeney (2004) brought heterosexual couples into the lab and measured their attachment styles; one member of the dyad was then told they would have to give a speech, with the other person waiting outside. The speaker received either very supportive or less supportive notes, supposedly written by his/her partner. There was no difference between the participants who received the supportive notes. When participants received the less supportive notes, highly avoidant participants viewed the notes most negatively. The second note (received after they'd given the speech) was perceived as most negative by highly anxious participants. Secure individuals took the notes in stride and interpreted them as more neutral in tone than the other participants.

1. Attachment Style Combinations

- Attachment style affects communication in a relationship and the attributions partners make about each other.
- Kirkpatrick and Davis (1994) studied couples in which one member was avoidant and one was anxious/ambivalent; while the expectations of these two types are complementary, these relationships are low in satisfaction and high in communication problems. Despite this, anxious women paired with avoidant men had very stable relationships because they attribute relationship problems to their partner's gender. In contrast, couples in which the man is anxious and the woman is avoidant do not last long because each person's behavior is seen as especially troubling because it deviates from the stereotype.
- Attachment styles can change over time and in the context of different relationships.

C. Social Exchange in Long-Term Relationships

- Research has shown ample support for social exchange theory in intimate relationships. Rusbult (1983) finds that rewards are always important in determining the outcome of relationships, while costs become increasingly important over time. Her **investment model** of relationships defines investments as anything people have put into relationships that would be lost if they left it. The greater the investment, the less likely people are to leave a relationship, even if satisfaction is low and other alternatives look promising (Figures 10.3 and 10.4). Thus people's commitment to a relationship depends on their satisfaction with the relationship, their view of alternatives, and how much they have invested in the relationship.
- Van Lange et al. (1997) found that the investment model predicts couples' willingness to make sacrifices for their relationship.
- Rusbult and Martz (1995) surveyed women at a battered women's shelter and found that those who had stayed in an abusive relationship were less dissatisfied, had fewer alternatives, and had higher investments in their marriages.

D. Equity in Long-Term Relationships

- In new or casual relationships, people trade benefits "in kind"; in intimate relationships, people trade very different resources and are looser about it.
- **Exchange relationships** are relationships governed by the need for equity while **communal relationships** are relationships in which people's primary concern is being responsive to the other person's needs.
- Clark and her colleagues demonstrated this by having the person interact with an attractive other who was presented as being either new to the area and interested in making new friends (fostering a communal orientation) or just visiting for a brief time (fostering an exchange orientation). People in the communal orientation condition were less interested in a tit-for-tat accounting of outcomes (Figure 10.5). These and other studies show that friendships are more communal than acquaintanceships.
- People in communal relationships are not completely unconcerned with equity—if the relationship is inequitable, they will be dissatisfied. However, the accounting is looser and occurs over time.

IV. Ending Intimate Relationships

- The American divorce rate is still nearly 50%. In addition, romantic relationships outside of marriage end every day.

A. The Process of Breaking Up

- Duck (1982) theorizes that there are four stages of dissolution of a relationship: intrapersonal (focusing on dissatisfaction), dyadic (revealing these to the partner), social (announcing the breakup to others), and back to intrapersonal (devising accounts of the breakup as we recover from it) (Figure 10.6).
- Rusbult et al. have elaborated on social exchange theory to create a typology of four types of behavior that occur in troubled relationships: exit (harming or terminating the relationship), voice (actively, constructively attempting to improve conditions), loyalty (passively and optimistically waiting for conditions to improve), and neglect (passively allowing conditions to deteriorate). These four types vary along the two dimensions of how constructive vs. destructive they are and of how active vs. passive they are. Rusbult's research suggests that destructive behaviors harm relationships more than constructive behavior helps, and that if both partners act destructively, the relationship typically ends.
- Femlee (1995) found that 30% of breakups in college were "fatal attractions": the qualities that were initially attractive later became the reasons for a breakup.
- Recent research shows no sex difference in who ends romantic relationships.

B. The Experience of Breaking Up

- Akert and others find that the role people play in a breakup is a key determinant of how they feel about it: breakees were most upset, breakers least, and mutuals in the middle. Women experienced somewhat more negative emotions than men. And whether people wanted to remain friends depended on gender: men only were interested if the breakup had been mutual; women were more interested overall, especially if they had been the breakee (Figure 10.7).