Interpersonal attraction.

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Chapter 3

Interpersonal Attraction

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In recent weeks, Susan has been thinking about starting a new romantic relationship. Although she is neither lonely nor depressed, Susan's high needs for intimacy and affiliation have not been satisfied by her current group of friends and acquaintances. Since moving to a new apartment complex three months ago, she has had casual yet repeated contact with a man named John who recently moved into an apartment two doors down from her. While Susan has exchanged little more than formal greetings and pleasant glances with John, she has begun to find him increasingly more attractive. Similar to Susan, John is a sociable and physically attractive person. In light of his attractiveness, Susan assumes that he must be a warm, self-confident, and talented individual.

The following week, Susan and John separately attend a large party for residents of the apartment complex. The party is held in a dimly lit, cool room filled with soft, pleasant music. Despite the fact that Susan and John happen to be in very good moods, both are somewhat apprehensive about having to meet and interact with new people. After getting up the nerve, Susan approaches John and starts a conversation. From the outset, her nonverbal behavior toward him is very positive; she maintains eye contact, smiles, laughs, and adopts a relaxed, open body posture. Within minutes, she discovers that John is indeed a very warm and interesting person, someone whom she both likes and respects. As they pass the evening together, Susan learns that she and John have similar attitudes, personality characteristics, personal backgrounds, and leisure interests. Moreover, Susan senses that John likes her just as much as she likes him. By the end of the night, they have embarked on a new relationship.

This scenario highlights many of the factors that are known to increase interpersonal attraction during the initial stages of relationship formation. As this example illustrates, interpersonal attraction is best conceptualized as a dynamic process that unfolds over time and is governed by a myriad of different precipitating events. Two aspects of this vignette are worth emphasizing. First, even though the precise sequence of events that produce attraction can vary depending on the nature of the relationship and the circumstances under which it develops (Berscheid and Graziano 1978), interpersonal attraction often does not commence unless a person: wants to initiate a relationship; is in close enough physical proximity with an individual to establish and sustain interaction; and has the social skills necessary to initiate and maintain the relationship. Once these prerequisites have been met, features associated with the other person (John) and the unique fit between the two interactants (John and Susan) can influence the attraction process. Second, contrary to popular wisdom, the extent to which a given perceiver (Susan) is attracted to another person (John) often depends as much on the attributes of the perceiver (e.g., Susan's current needs, desires and social skills), the environment in which the initial interaction takes place, and the unique fit between the perceiver and the other (e.g., the degree to which Susan and John are similar) as it does on the quality of attributes possessed by the other (John).
Interpersonal attraction, therefore, is much more than merely the sum of positive features associated with the object of attraction.

Every relationship can be traced back to its beginning, a point in time when partners first met and the relationship was not close. To date, most research on interpersonal attraction has focused on why people initially become attracted to one another during the early stages of relationship formation. Considerably less attention has been devoted to examining what kinds of factors maintain attraction during the latter stages of relationship development. Given these circumstances, the present chapter will predominantly focus on factors known to increase or decrease attraction between people involved in the early stages of relationship formation, usually prior to the development of pronounced closeness.

In reviewing the attraction literature, we will draw from several different disciplines, including anthropology, sociology and social psychology. The primary perspective guiding our review, however, will be social psychology. Social psychologists "attempt to understand and explain how the thought, feeling, and behavior of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others" (Allport 1954, pp. 5). Hence, we will seek to understand how the actual, imagined, or implied actions of one person affect the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of another person as the attraction process unfolds.

We first present a formal definition of interpersonal attraction and explain how the construct traditionally has been measured. We then describe a general model of relationship closeness proposed by Harold Kelley and his colleagues (Kelley et al. 1983) into which most of the major variables known to facilitate attraction can be classified. Next, we selectively review the interpersonal attraction literature, highlighting how existing research on attraction can be organized within the Kelley et al. model. Whenever possible, we specify what kinds of psychological theories or principles have been invoked to explain why certain variables influence interpersonal attraction. In the final section, we speculate about where conceptual and empirical gaps exist in the field of interpersonal attraction, and we suggest some possible avenues for future research.

Interpersonal Attraction: Definition, Measurement, and a Model

Interpersonal attraction can be defined as a motivational state in which an individual is predisposed to think, feel, and usually behave in a positive manner toward another person (Berscheid 1985). Over the years, the attraction construct has been operationalized and measured in different ways. Most frequently, it has been assessed by simply asking perceivers to provide self-reports of how much they like, respect, have positive feelings toward, and/or harbor positive thoughts about someone else. Somewhat less often, the construct has been measured by peer-reports (provided by friends, siblings or parents) designed to index the degree to which two people appear to be attracted to each other and by life record data (e.g., permanent records of who marries whom). On relatively rare occasions,
attraction has been inferred from behavioral measures of who chooses to be with whom and/or the quality and emotional tone of interaction that transpires between two people.

Interpersonal attraction can and often does begin in the absence of direct contact. Yet attraction typically cannot progress beyond rudimentary stages unless two people eventually interact. Indeed, positive regard for someone usually occurs between, and is shaped by the quality of interactions that transpire between, two people (Berscheid 1985). Drawing on this premise, Kelley et al. (1983) have developed a model of relationship closeness which contends that the nature and quality of interactions two people have are influenced by four casual conditions: P variables (attributes specific to the person evaluating the other: e.g., Susan); E variables (factors that characterize the physical and social environment in which the relationship begins and is embedded); O variables (attributes specific to the other who serves as the target of evaluation: e.g., John); and P x O variables (emergent variables that are unique to the relationship between P and O: e.g., the fit between Susan and John).

These four sets of precipitating conditions and the variables that constitute them are dynamic and interactive in nature (Gifford and Gallagher 1985; Wright, Ingraham, and Blackmer 1985). For example, the kinds of attributes that P brings to an initial encounter can drastically alter what P values in O as well as whether P and O have—or can develop—common interests. Similarly, the environmental context in which an initial interaction takes place can profoundly affect whether P finds O appealing and, hence, whether P and O interact long enough to identify their similarities or feelings of mutual attraction.

To simplify our presentation, we have classified each of the major variables known to heighten or diminish attraction into one of the four categories identified by Kelley et al. (1983). Because interpersonal attraction typically begins with the attributes that P brings to an initial encounter, we first review variables associated with P that tend to promote or inhibit the initial stages of the attraction process. We then examine how features of the environment (E) influence attraction, especially during the early stages of relationship formation (first encounters). Following this, we review what sorts of attributes possessed by O affect interpersonal attraction. We conclude by exploring how the unique fit between P and O influences attraction.

**P Variables**

Susan's attraction to John was facilitated from the outset by her specific motives, predispositions, and social skills. She had strong needs for intimacy and affiliation that were not being met by her existing social network. She was neither lonely nor depressed, and she approached John expecting that he was warm, would like her, and would reciprocate her warmth and positive feelings. Past research has shown that the type of social motives, social deficiencies and inter-
personal expectancies a person brings to a social encounter can dramatically affect the degree to which a person is attracted to another individual.

Social Motives

People typically seek out relationships to satisfy their needs for affiliation and/or intimacy (McClelland 1951; McAdams 1982). Individuals who have a strong need to affiliate with others tend to establish and maintain a large number of social contacts. To meet this need, they adopt an active and controlling orientation toward relationships in which breadth and quantity of social ties assume paramount importance (McClelland 1985). Persons high in need for affiliation tend to spend more time talking to other people (McClelland 1985), are more self-confident (Crouse and Mehrabian 1977), and make more friends during the school year (Greendlinger and Byrne 1985).

Conversely, persons with a high need for intimacy prefer a smaller number of close, warm, and intimate relationships. As a result, they tend to adopt a more passive and less controlling style in which depth and quality of relationships are stressed. People high in need for intimacy usually are more trusting, confide more in others, and experience greater subjective well-being (McAdams and Bryant 1987; McAdams, Healy, and Krause 1984).

Individuals who have strong intimacy needs tend to display better long-term psychological adjustment than do those who possess strong needs for affiliation (McAdams and Vaillant 1982). This implies that attraction which is based on the quality of relationships might yield greater long-term happiness and personal satisfaction than attraction that stems from sheer quantity of social contacts.

Social Deficiencies

Three major types of social deficiencies impede social interaction and, therefore, hinder the development of interpersonal attraction: social anxiety, loneliness, and depression. Social anxiety involves feelings of discomfort and awkwardness when in the presence of others (Leary 1983). Even though it can have many different origins (Leary 1987), acute social anxiety frequently emanates from concerns about proper self-presentation in social settings (Schlenker and Leary 1982), and it is closely linked to chronic shyness (Zimbardo 1977). Extreme anxiety thwarts initial attraction by trapping people in a cycle of negative social interactions in which social withdrawal on the part of P is interpreted as rejection by O. This leads O to rebuff P, thereby justifying and thus perpetuating P's high level of anxiety (Jones and Carpenter 1986). These events are compounded by the fact that highly anxious persons are more likely to over-interpret or misinterpret innocuous events that occur in their interactions (Maddox, Norton, and Leary 1988), further exacerbating their timid, reclusive nature.

Loneliness is perhaps the most common social deficiency. It typically occurs during important life transitions (e.g., moving away to college) and major life
disruptions (e.g., the loss of a long-term romantic partner). Perlman and Peplau (1981) define loneliness as a feeling of deprivation originating from unsatisfactory social relations with others. Two distinct types of loneliness have been identified (Weiss 1973): social isolation (which is felt when social contacts are too infrequent); and emotional isolation (which is experienced when in-depth, emotionally close relationships are lacking). Loneliness impedes social interaction in much the same way as does acute anxiety. During social encounters, lonely individuals tend to be less responsive to, less sensitive to, and less intimate with their interaction partners. Consequently, they are perceived by others as being less socially competent (Sloan and Solano 1984; Spitzberg and Carney 1985).

Depression also can generate interaction styles that sharply curtail the development of attraction. Depressed people often reject and dismiss others, have awkward and inadequate social skills, and are rejected by others in turn (Hokanson, et al. 1986; Strack and Coyne 1983).

These three deficiencies oftentimes are witnessed simultaneously in a given individual (Jones and Carpenter 1986). In fact, the presence of one deficiency can induce the others. Chronic social anxiety, for instance, often elicits social rejection from others. Over time, repeated rejection can produce loneliness and, in extreme cases, depression. What links these deficiencies together is that all three impede interpersonal attraction by making people more socially cautious when communicating with others (Pietromonaco and Rook 1987; Vaux 1988). By avoiding situations that pose the threat of social rejection, persons who harbor these deficiencies perpetuate their isolation and cannot progress to later stages of the attraction process.

Interpersonal Expectancies

It has long been known that, prior to meeting someone, the mere anticipation of interaction can heighten attraction to them (Darley and Berscheid 1967). In recent years, researchers have begun to identify how specific expectancies that a person brings to an initial encounter can alter the degree of attraction experienced toward others. Two of the most important expectancies are perceptions of others, physical attractiveness and beliefs concerning whether they initially like us.

Mark Snyder and his colleagues have shown that when men think they are talking to an attractive woman over a phone (independent of her actual appearance), women behave in a more friendly, sociable, and skilled manner than when men are led to believe that the woman is unattractive (Snyder, Tanke, and Berscheid 1977). That is, expectancies about another person’s level of physical attractiveness can channel interactions between men and women such that men bring out positive attributes in women whom they believe are attractive and negative attributes in women whom they presume are unattractive. These different styles of interaction affect the extent of attraction interactants feel for each other.

Furthermore, when people enter an interaction believing that their partner likes them, they disclose more, disagree less, adopt a warmer attitude, and talk in a more pleasant tone of voice (Curtis and Miller 1986). This behavior elicits
reciprocal warmth from the partner. Thus, perceptions of liking—even if they are not true—can stimulate positive communication and increase attraction.

E Variables

One of the primary reasons why Susan initially became attracted to John was his close proximity to her, a situation that allowed for frequent (albeit informal and fleeting) contact. Moreover, when Susan approached John to strike up a formal conversation at the party, the physical and social environment was highly conducive for fostering attraction: the room was dimly lit, cool, and filled with soft, pleasant music. Despite the fact that Susan was in a good mood, she approached John feeling a diffuse sense of arousal and excitement. More than three decades of research has revealed that all of these factors tend to fuel interpersonal attraction.

Physical Proximity

Perhaps the best predictor of whether two people eventually will like one another is the sheer amount of contact they have. Needless to say, individuals must meet and interact for attraction to fully blossom. This point is most eloquently illustrated in a classic study by Leon Festinger and his colleagues. Festinger, Schachter, and Back (1950) studied friendship patterns in a large student housing complex where apartments were assigned randomly (i.e., on a first come, first served basis). The strongest predictor of who eventually became friends with whom was the location of their apartments. Persons who lived close together and came in contact with each other more often were more likely to become friends. Indeed, close proximity has been found to increase attraction among soldiers assigned to bomber crews (Kipnis 1957), college students assigned to alphabetized seats in their classes (Segal 1974), senior citizens randomly placed in high-rise apartment complexes (Nahemow and Lawton 1975), and homeowners in new subdivisions (Whyte 1956). In each case, persons who are closer to and have more frequent contact with each other tend to become better friends.

The effects of proximity, of course, are not always positive. Some of the people we dislike the most also tend to live nearby (Ebbesen, Kjos, and Konecni 1976). Thus, proximity provides the opportunity for interaction; it does not determine its quality.

Why does proximity generally increase attraction? Five plausible reasons exist. First, Zajonc (1968) has argued that repeated exposure to objects or people produces increased liking because familiar things are presumed to be safe and, hence, comforting. Although there are limits to this mere exposure effect (Harrison 1977; Perlman and Oskamp 1971; Swap 1977), it serves as one of the primary means through which proximity increases attraction. Even relatively infrequent exposure to a person (e.g., seeing someone briefly once a week) can increase attraction (Saegert, Swap, and Zajonc 1973). Second, frequent interaction typically
enhances perceptions of the similarity between people, thereby facilitating attraction (Moreland and Zajonc 1982). Third, frequent contact allows people to explore their actual similarities and sense reciprocal liking for each other (Insko and Wilson 1977), permitting them to see themselves as a social unit (Arkin and Burger 1980). Fourth, regular interaction leads people to anticipate future contact which, in turn, enhances liking (Darley and Berscheid 1967). Anticipation of interaction generates liking because, by presuming that others will be pleasant, people can maximize any rewards that might emerge from the forthcoming interaction (Knight and Vallacher 1981; Tyler and Sears 1977). Fifth, individuals in close proximity are more readily accessible and available. Hence, they can provide rewards without inflicting the costs of time, effort, and money associated with persons who are not nearby.

Features of the Physical and Social Environment

Various features of the physical environment in which an interaction takes place can have subtle yet dramatic effects on interpersonal attraction. When people are evaluated in hot, humid rooms (Griffitt 1970) or in the presence of unpleasant music (May and Hamilton 1980), they tend to be seen as less attractive. Similarly, if raters have just witnessed a distressing event (e.g., a sad movie [Gouaux 1971]) or heard bad news (Veitch and Griffitt 1976), they usually rate others more harshly.

What accounts for these effects? According to the Reinforcement-Affect Model (Clore and Byrne 1974), positive emotion is generated when an individual experiences pleasant physical and/or social environments, while negative emotion is produced when environments are unpleasant. This positive or negative affect, in turn, is unwittingly and often unconsciously associated with persons who are present when the affect is experienced. Clore and Byrne conjecture that positive emotion produces attraction to others, whereas negative emotion results in repulsion.

Certain aspects of the social context in which an interaction occurs also can promote attraction. In an ingenious study, Dutton and Aron (1974) arranged for men to meet an attractive woman after walking over either a low-lying, stable bridge or an unstable bridge situated over a deep ravine. Men who had just crossed the wobbly bridge rated the woman as more attractive than did those who walked across the stable one. Although their interpretation of this finding has been the subject of debate (Kenrick and Cialdini 1977; Kenrick, Cialdini, and Linder 1979), Dutton and Aron argue that the intense arousal associated with traversing the unstable bridge was mistakenly attributed to strong liking for the woman, a misattribution that produced greater attraction.

Working from a different perspective, Stanley Schachter (1959) has shown that situationally-induced fear can heighten attraction toward others who must confront the same threatening situation, especially in individuals who were born first in their families. Events that provoke stress and fear, however, produce greater attraction only when affiliation with others can reduce the negative im-
The extent to which a person is seen as attractive also is contingent on whether the person is evaluated in relation to highly attractive others (e.g., models), when during the course of a social evening evaluations are made, and whether parents or authority figures approve of the relationship. Douglas Kenrick and his colleagues have found that men rate their dating partners as less physically attractive (Kenrick and Gutierres 1980) and report less love for them (Kenrick, Gutierres, and Goldberg 1989) after viewing highly attractive female models. Male patrons of country-and-western bars tend to rate women as more attractive as the night wears on (Pennebaker et al. 1979). And borrowing an idea from the play Romeo and Juliet, Driscoll, Davis, and Lipatz (1972) have demonstrated that interference by parents in their son’s or daughter’s dating relationship breeds greater mutual attraction and commitment among young lovers.

What psychological principle explains some of these effects? One viable candidate is reactance theory (Brehm 1966). Psychological reactance is a negative motivational state that begins to operate when individuals feel that their freedom to behave as they want to is unfairly restricted. One means by which people attempt to reinstate their freedom is to distort the attractiveness of the objects on which restrictions have been imposed. Thus, as closing time draws near, all of the women suddenly become more appealing. And as interference by parents escalates, one’s lover is perceived as more desirable.

Susan was also drawn to John because of the positive attributes he possessed. To begin with, he was a physically attractive person. On the basis of his attractiveness, Susan implicitly assumed that he possessed a host of other admirable characteristics, an assumption that subtly altered Susan’s conversational behavior toward John and elicited positive verbal and nonverbal behavior from him at the party. While conversing with him, Susan learned that John’s personal attributes were just as stellar as was his physical appearance; John conveyed the impression of being highly likable and a person worthy of admiration and respect. Empirical studies have shown that all of these features enhance attraction.

Physical Attractiveness

Physical attractiveness differs from other personal attributes in that it serves as the first and sometimes only characteristic of others that individuals can evaluate in the absence of direct contact. In light of this fact, physical attractiveness is unique among attributes of O because it can strongly influence interpersonal attraction during the earliest stages of the attraction process (Berscheid and Walster 1974; Hatfield and Sprecher 1986). Most other personal attributes (e.g., O’s
personality, attitudes, and values) can be inferred only after direct interaction has taken place. As a result, attributes other than physical attractiveness tend to play a more important role during later stages of attraction.

Why does physical attractiveness facilitate global attraction? Attractive people usually reward those with whom they associate in at least four different ways. First, attractive people are more aesthetically pleasing to look at. Second, they tend to be more socially skilled (Goldman and Lewis 1977) and, therefore, more rewarding as interaction partners. Third, individuals can reap benefits by associating with highly attractive others (Waller 1937). Friends of attractive same-sex peers, for example, are rated by others as more attractive simply through their association with attractive peers (Geiselman, Haight, and Kimata 1984; Kernis and Wheeler 1981). In addition, men who date attractive women are evaluated more highly than men who do not (Sigall and Landy 1973), although women do not accrue similar benefits from dating attractive men (Bar-Tal and Saxe 1976). Fourth, people tacitly assume that attractive people are good people (Dion, Berscheid, and Walster 1972). Regardless of their actual attributes, attractive people are believed to be more poised, interesting, sociable, independent, exciting, and sexually warm than their less attractive counterparts (Brigham 1980). Attractive persons also are considered to be more intelligent, more successful, and happier (Hatfield and Sprecher 1986). Less attractive individuals, on the other hand, are presumed to be more deviant in terms of psychopathology, their political views, and their sexual lifestyle (Jones, Hannson, and Phillips 1978; Unger, Hilderbrand, and Madar 1982).

This “beautiful-is-good” stereotype facilitates attraction in two ways. First, by believing that attractive people have a variety of desirable features, the aesthetic rewards associated with being in their presence increase. Second, by harboring this stereotype, individuals behave in ways that actually elicit good deeds, attributes, and actions from attractive people (Langlois 1986).

In general, however, this stereotype is not completely true. While physically attractive persons do tend to be more socially skilled (Chaiken 1979; Goldman and Lewis 1977), more socially assertive (Jackson and Huston 1975), less prone to psychological disorders (Hatfield and Sprecher 1986), more successful at attaining higher levels of education, income, and occupational status (Umberson and Hughes 1984), and have more satisfying interactions with others (Reis, Nezlek, and Wheeler 1980), they do not possess all of the positive features embodied in the stereotype. Most individuals, however, treat attractive persons as if they do. Because of this, these desirable features are elicited from attractive people during social interaction, heightening their global appeal (Langlois 1986).

Perceptions of what makes a person physically attractive vary from person to person (Berscheid and Walster 1974) and from culture to culture (Hatfield and Sprecher 1986). Nevertheless, investigators have begun to identify what kinds of physical features make faces attractive to most people. Contrary to popular conceptions, Langlois and Roggman (1990) have found that people are most strongly attracted to faces whose features conform to the average of the population. Individuals with facial features that do not deviate too much from what is normal
might be perceived as more attractive if such features were associated with other attributes that were adaptive during evolutionary history.

Research also has begun to identify what specific kinds of facial features men and women find differentially attractive. Women who have youthful, immature facial features such as relatively large eyes, small noses, small chins, and broad smiles tend to be rated as more attractive by men (Cunningham 1986). Men who have a mixture of immature features (large eyes), mature features (prominent cheek bones and large chins), and expressive features (broad smiles) are viewed as more attractive by women (Cunningham, Barbee, and Pike 1990). Adopting an evolutionary perspective, Cunningham argues that youthful features in women are more attractive because they indicate fertility and high reproductive potential in women. A mixture of mature, immature, and expressive features in men may be perceived as more attractive to the extent that maturity signifies higher status and greater capacity to provide resources, while immaturity and expressiveness convey personal warmth and lack of threat. In line with these speculations, men who display non-aggressive, socially dominant behaviors during social interactions are viewed as more physically attractive than those who do not (Sallada, Kenrick, and Vershure 1987).

**Personality**

Certain personality attributes tend to be universally valued in others, regardless of the idiosyncratic needs of perceivers. When it comes to choosing friends, for example, sincerity is valued most highly, whereas being a liar and phoniness are most abhorred (Anderson 1968). With regard to mate selection, both men and women prefer mates who are good companions, considerate, honest, affectionate, dependable, intelligent, kind, understanding, interesting to converse with, and loyal (Buss and Barnes 1986).

Two major components of personality appear to influence global attraction: feelings of affection for another based on warmth, and feelings of respect based on competence (Lydon, Jamieson, and Zanna 1988; Rubin 1973). These two dimensions have relatively independent effects on attraction. More specifically, people who score high on both dimensions are rated as most attractive, whereas those who score low on both dimensions are seen as least attractive.

Warmth is communicated by expressing positive attitudes toward other people, objects, or events in general (Folkes and Sears 1977). It also is conveyed by nonverbal behaviors such as smiling at others, paying attention to them, and openly expressing one’s emotion (Friedman, Riggio, and Casella 1988; Simpson, Gangestad, and Biek 1992).

Competence is expressed through intelligence, social skills, and knowledge. Too much competence can sometimes reduce global attraction, particularly if observers feel threatened by excessive talent. If highly competent people occasionally make minor blunders, however, such pratfalls can enhance their attractiveness in the eyes of observers (Aronson, Willerman, and Floyd 1966).
Finally, individuals also perceive as more attractive persons who are relatively dominant (Palmer and Byrne 1970), competitive (Riskind and Wilson 1982), personally agreeable (Kaplan and Anderson 1973), and those who mutually disclose personal information (McAllister and Bregman 1983).

\textbf{\textit{P} \times \textit{O} \textit{Variables}}

Once Susan began talking with John, she learned that they shared many similarities. For instance, they held similar views on important issues, they had relatively similar personalities and personal backgrounds, and they liked to do many of the same leisure activities. In essence, their personal attributes and preferences seemed to match up and mesh fairly well. As these commonalities emerged, John and Susan began to sense that their liking for one another was mutual. Research suggests that all of these factors promote attraction.

\textit{Similarity between \textit{P} and \textit{O}}

One of the strongest predictors of interpersonal attraction is similarity; people who are similar on important attributes and personal preferences tend to experience greater attraction. The tendency for similar people to be attracted to each other has been documented in five areas: attitudes, personality, demographic characteristics, behavioral styles, and physical attractiveness.

The bulk of research has been done on attitude similarity (Byrne 1971). At base, two kinds of attitudinal similarity can affect attraction: actual similarity and perceived similarity. In one of the finest interpersonal attraction studies ever conducted, Theodore Newcomb (1961) provided a small group of male undergraduates with room and board in exchange for the opportunity to observe how same-sex friendships develop over time. After information on several attitudinal, personality, and demographic variables was collected, members of the boarding house were randomly assigned to roommates. Men who initially thought they held similar opinions on important issues liked each other more at the beginning of the semester. Once students got to know each other, however, actual attitudinal similarity became a better predictor of who liked whom. That is, men who had similar attitudes were more likely to become friends at the end of the semester. This effect has been replicated among men confined to a small fallout shelter (Griffitt and Veitch 1974), among women in their preferences for college roommates (Hill and Stull 1981), and in a computer dating study (Byrne, Ervin, and Lamberth 1970). Recent research suggests that attitude similarity may be more important in enhancing respect, whereas similarity of personal interests might be more critical in generating liking (Lydon et al. 1988).

Personality similarity tends to be a weaker predictor of interpersonal attraction compared to attitudinal similarity. Nevertheless, individuals do prefer others who are similar to themselves in their standing on traditional versus non-traditional sex-role orientation, masculinity versus femininity, sensation-seeking, and cognitive style (Antill 1983; Barry 1970). For personality dimensions on which
similarity does not actually exist, friends frequently assume that it does (Feinberg, Miller, and Ross 1981).

Persons who are similar on salient demographic characteristics also experience greater mutual attraction (Newcomb 1961). Best friends in high school, for instance, tend to be similar with respect to their grade in school, age, sex, race, religion, and social class (Kandel 1978). College dating couples typically are similar on age, IQ, educational plans, religion, race, and even height (Hill, Rubin, and Replan 1976).

People who adopt similar behavioral styles also are drawn to one another. Individuals who are similar in the frequency with which they make personal self-disclosures tend to like each other more (Daher and Banikiotes 1976). People also like those who imitate their positive behaviors and make the same decisions that they do (Roberts et al. 1981; Thelen et al. 1981). Finally, friends typically are similar in how often they engage in deviant behavior (e.g., drug use: Kandel, Single, and Kessler 1976).

Persons involved in relationships usually are matched in their level of physical attractiveness (Feingold 1988). This is true of marriages (Price and Vandenberg 1973), dating relationships (Berscheid et al. 1971), and even same-sex friendships (Cass and Derlega 1978). Why is this so? Even though most people ideally would like to be in relationships with persons who are maximally attractive (Walster et al. 1963), the most attractive individuals tend to pair-off, resulting in a narrowed pool of eligibles for those who are less attractive. Accordingly, individuals typically form relationships with others who are similar to themselves in attractiveness.

Similarity clearly breeds attraction on many different dimensions. What accounts for this? According to Byrne and Clore (1970), similarity to others is rewarding because it reassures, confirms, and validates people's views about the world. It also promotes anticipatory reciprocity (Aronson and Worchel 1966). Indeed, as we will discuss later, expectations about whether someone will like us can have stronger effects on attraction than the perceived similarity of their attitudes (Condon and Crano 1988).

Of course, similarity does not always lead to attraction. Situations do arise in which dissimilar persons are preferred over similar ones. People are more attracted to dissimilar others when such individuals offer new information (Gormly 1975), reduce uncertainty or confusion in unfamiliar settings (Russ, Gold, and Stone 1980), or make us feel special or unique (Snyder and Fromkin 1980). Dissimilar others also are preferred when being similar to someone is threatening (e.g., when the similar other is mentally ill: Novak and Lerner 1968) and when individuals are assured from the outset that dissimilar others will like them (Walster and Walser 1963).

Complementarity

Some theorists (e.g., Winch 1958) have suggested that opposites should be most strongly attracted to one another. According to this view, people should be drawn to others who can maximally gratify their specific needs. As a result, they should
gravitate toward those with complementary needs. Dominant individuals, for instance, should be attracted to submissive persons toward whom dominant actions can be directed, and vice versa. Although complementarity of needs can operate in well established, long-term relationships (Kerckhoff and Davis 1962), it appears to influence such relationships on only a few dimensions and in a limited number of situations (Levinger, Senn, and Jorgensen 1970). Generally speaking, need compatibility (a form of similarity) is a much stronger force in generating attraction between two people than is need complementarity.

Despite the fact that little evidence has been marshaled for Winch’s theory at the level of personality, attitudes, and demographic characteristics (Berscheid and Walster 1978; Buss 1984), complementarity principles may operate in some domains. Behavioral complementarity (Strong et al. 1988) and complementarity that occurs with regard to abilities and areas of personal achievement (Tesser 1988) both can increase attraction to another person. Moreover, different types of resources that individuals have or own can be exchanged in a complementary way (Foa 1971). In personal ads run by dating services, for example, women often highlight their relative youth and attractiveness, while men request this information. Men, on the other hand, commonly offer security and provide financial information, whereas women seek these attributes (Green, Buchanan, and Heuer 1984; Harrison and Saeed 1977). In fact, when complementarity occurs, it often is witnessed in romantic relationships (Buss 1985).

**Reciprocal Liking**

As a general rule, people like others who like them and say nice things about them (Sachs 1976). Indeed, one person’s liking for another individual is strongly predicated on reciprocal liking (Kenny and Nasby 1980). When people enter new relationships, they tacitly assume that those they like will like them in return (Curry and Emerson 1970). Merely being told that someone either likes us or evaluates us highly produces feelings of reciprocal affection (Berscheid and Walster 1978). How is reciprocal liking generated? Individuals who anticipate that an interaction partner likes them disclose more, disagree less, and exude a warmer demeanor, all of which elicit warmth and reciprocal affection from their partner (Curtis and Miller 1986).

Even though people tend to be attracted to those who like them, there are limits to the reciprocity effect. If praise is too extreme or unwarranted, it may be seen as ingratiation driven by ulterior motives (Jones 1964). Under such circumstances, excessive flattery may result in the loss of respect for, and decreased attraction to, the flatterer (Shrauger 1975). Individuals who lavish too much praise on others often have their praise either taken for granted (Aronson and Linder 1965) or are perceived as undiscriminating and less intelligent (Amabile 1983), attributes that undermine attraction. On the whole, people are most strongly attracted to those whose praise and affection is either directed selectively to them (Walster et al. 1973) or who are moderately difficult to attract (Wright and Contrada 1986).
Conclusion and Summary

Interpersonal attraction is a complicated and dynamic process that occurs over time and is influenced by a wide array of different factors. The vignette describing Susan and John epitomizes how this process frequently unfolds. Prior to meeting John, Susan was prepared to develop a new relationship. The environmental conditions surrounding their relationship—both before and during their first formal conversation—were highly conducive to the development of rapid intimacy and strong attraction. While John's physical attractiveness initially drew Susan's attention, his positive personal attributes substantially increased her liking for him once they started conversing. Within a matter of minutes, they began to identify their similarities and to sense strong, mutual attraction.

We are not suggesting that attraction invariably unfolds in this precise sequence. Sometimes it follows different paths. Furthermore, we do not mean to imply that the variables discussed always increase or decrease attraction to others. People occasionally do enter new relationships even though they are not optimally prepared to do so; relationships sometimes do blossom under highly aversive environmental conditions; people can be attracted to others who are physically unattractive (by most people's standards) or who have negative personal attributes; and, in rare cases, individuals sometimes are drawn to persons with whom they share few similarities. These anomalies, however, are exceptions to the general principles discussed.

Where should future research on interpersonal attraction be directed? Four possible avenues come to mind. First, considering that attraction is a process that emerges over time, past research has been notoriously static in nature. It typically has isolated and studied only one stage of the attraction process at a time, with a disproportionately large amount of attention having been devoted to O and P x O factors at the expense of E and P factors. More longitudinal research needs to be conducted in which the independent and interactive effects of P, E, O, and P x O variables on interpersonal attraction are studied within relationships as they develop. Attention also should focus on how attraction changes over time within the same relationship.

Second, most research to date has studied attraction during the early stages of relationship formation. Less work has examined how attraction is maintained once a relationship becomes close and committed. Johnson and Rusbult (1989) have shown that individuals who are more committed to their romantic relationships devalue and derogate potential alternative partners more strongly than do less committed individuals, especially when alternatives are highly attractive and pose a clear threat to the relationship. On a more general level, Simpson, Gangested, and Lerma (1990) have found that people involved in exclusive dating relationships perceive young, opposite-sex persons to be less physically and sexually attractive compared to people who are not dating someone exclusively. This effect may reflect the operation of psychological mechanisms that buffer established relationships from dissolution. At present, however, only a limited number of studies have investigated rela-
tionship maintenance processes. Future work should explore how attraction is maintained in long-term relationships.

Third, since the needs of P can strongly influence whether the attraction process initiates and how it evolves, far too little attention has been allotted to understanding how the needs of P interact with E, O, and P x O variables to produce strong attraction. Future research should focus more explicitly on the role that personal needs, motives, and drives play in the attraction process.

Finally, the majority of research on attraction has centered on same-sex friendships and romantic relationships. Much less attention has been paid to other types of relationships (e.g., gay relationships, relationships between younger and older persons). Future research should redress this shortcoming.

Observant readers will note that most of the research cited in this chapter was conducted prior to the early 1980s. What has happened to research on interpersonal attraction during the past decade? Guided by Kelley et al.’s (1983) model of relationship closeness, research has gradually shifted from studying how important variables in the interpersonal attraction process affect relationship initiation to studying how they influence what transpires in close, long-term relationships. Nevertheless, interpersonal attraction research remains alive and well; it now is simply being conducted in the context close relationships.

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