**Significant Factors in the Initiation and Development of Relationships**

**(Romantic and Platonic)**

***1) Physical Attractiveness*** – It is well documented that physically attractive people are well liked, especially as prospective dates. In a study by Sprecher & Duck (1994) it was found that similarity was the second most important reason for pursuing future dates, physical attractiveness was the most important. However, as predicted by *matching hypothesis,* people usually initiate interaction with partners who are about as attractive as they are (Walster & Walster 1969; Berscheid et al., 1971; Huston, 1973). It appears that the desire to date an attractive person is balanced by a fear of rejection, by experience with rejection from more attractive others (Hamilton, 1981), or social forces beyond their own control (Aron, 1988; Kalick & Hamilton, 1986). Research also shows that when we are with people who are more attractive, it makes us feel less attractive (Thornton & Moore, 1993) which in turn can make us feel bad about ourselves (Kenrick, Montello, Gutierres, and Trost, 1993). Dating couples studied at UCLA who were most similar in their physical appearance were most likely to have fallen more deeply in love after a nine month period (White, 1990).

**You might be wondering if attraction to attractiveness is the result of sexual attraction/desire?**

**NO!**

**- Physically attractive people are perceived as being**

**- happier**

**- more successful**

**- more socially desirable personality traits**

**Compared to less attractive people regardless of whether the respondent was rating a member of the same or opposite sex (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972).**

**- Even young children rate other young children more positively when they are physically attractive (Langlois & Stephan, 1981).**

***2) Similarity*** – Dating and married couples tend to be similar in age, race, religion, socioeconomic status, education, intelligence, physical attractiveness, and attitudes (Brehm, 1992; Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992). The similarity principle is evident in both friendships and romantic relationships regardless of sexual orientation (Boyden, Carroll, & Maier, 1984; Aube & Koestner, 1995).

**e.g. Gender Roles - those who identify strongly with traditional gender roles are more likely to be attracted to each other than those who identify less strongly with stereotypical gender roles (Pursell & Banikiotes, 1978).**

***3) Reciprocal Liking*** - Many studies have demonstrated that if you believe another person likes you, you are more likely to behave in a friendly manner toward them. Your friendly manner encourages them to respond to you more positively, which serves to confirm your initial expectation (they are likable). Aronson & Worchel (1966) have suggested that reciprocal liking may account for the effect of similarity on attraction. Similarity between us and another can cause an implicit assumption that the other person likes us (if we like ourselves we should like each

other). If there is a norm to reciprocate liking, we should like those who are similar. However, in initial encounters the effect of reciprocal liking is stronger than the effect of similarity on attraction. In fact, if we are lead to believe that someone else likes us, knowing they are ***NOT*** similar to us serves to increase our attraction. The implication being that they must really like us a lot if they are able to overlook our differences in attitudes and opinions (Jones, Bell, & Aronson, 1972).

**e.g. subjects interacted with confederates who expressed opinions either opposed or in agreement with those expressed by the subject. Later the subjects were allowed to overhear a conversation between the confederate and the experimenter in which the confederate expressed like or dislike for the subject. Later when the subject was asked to rate the likability of the confederate:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Confederate deemed Similar | Confederate deemed Dissimilar |
| Confederate expresses Like | attraction | strongest attraction |

**e.g. College students who were led to believe that another person liked them disclosed more about themselves to that person, spoke to him or her in a more pleasant way, and disagreed with the person less often (Curtis & Miller, 1986).**

***4) Propinquity – proximity/physical closeness.*** Generally people become acquainted with, and attracted to, someone who lives, works, shops, and plays nearby. Propinquity appears to lead to attraction in a variety of situations. This tendency is attributable to:

a) People near to us have more opportunities to ***REWARD*** us. In normal everyday interaction we are more likely to say nice things to others and to hear compliments in return than we are to say and hear negative things. So the more we interact with others, the more often we may be rewarded by them (Davis & Perkowitz, 1979; Werner & Latane, 1974).

b) The ***EXPECTATION***of future interaction with those who live and work near us. Those who are near to us today are likely to be near us tomorrow and the next day as well. We expect to interact with them again and again. There is pressure to form and maintain a positive relationship with those with whom we constantly interact (Darley & Berscheid, 1967).

**e.g Maryland State police trainees were assigned dormitory rooms and classroom seats in alphabetical order. Six months after their arrival each was asked to name their three closest friends among the trainees. Those whose last names were closer together in the alphabet were much more likely to be friends than those whose last names were further apart alphabetically (Segal, 1974).**

*Word of caution: the possibility exists that physical closeness magnifies the intensity of relationships regardless of direction. Survey data from Ebbesen, Kjos, & Konecni showed that the majority of an individual’s friends and enemies lived within the same neighbourhood (1976).*

***5) Familiarity*** – Related to propinquity, the closer we are to someone, the more we see them and the more familiar that person becomes. The *mere exposure effect* is an increase in positive feelings toward a novel stimulus (person) based on frequent exposure to it (him/her) (Zajonc, 1968). This phenomenon is so strong that we do not even have to be aware of our exposure to a stimulus for it to produce greater liking. In terms of relationships, greater liking increases the probability of initiating interaction.

**e.g. Subjects rated the attractiveness of 32 photos of female faces. A composite face of the 32 digitized faces was rated more attractive than any single face (Langlois & Roggman, 1990).**

**e.g. Subjects shown a number of photographs of people, some were shown often, some were shown infrequently. Later, subjects were asked how much they liked the photos of the people depicted in the photos. People whose pictures were shown frequently were rated as more likable than people whose photos were seen only once or twice (Zajonc, 1968).**

**e.g. Dichotic listening task. Words heard through one ear were to be matched with words they were reading in a text placed in front of them. In the other ear, a series of melodies (not referred to by the experimenter). Afterwards, subjects asked to listen to a series of melodies and indicate whether they were familiar and how much they liked each one. Although subjects could not consciously recognize the tunes, they rated the more familiar ones as more likable (Kunst-Wilson & Zajonc, 1980).**

*Exception: when our initial reaction to a novel stimulus is negative further exposure tends to intensify those negative feelings* (Perlman & Oskamp, 1971).