

The science of attraction essay sample

[Life](#), [Love](#)



Nothing is perhaps more important in people's lives than their relationships with others, and consequently, it is not surprising that liking and loving have become a major focus of interest for social psychologists. Known more formally as the study of interpersonal attraction or close relationships, this area addresses the factors that lead to positive feelings for others.

HOW DO I LIKE THEE? LET ME COUNT THE WAYS

By far, the greatest amount of research has focused on liking, probably because it is easier for investigators conducting short-term experiments to produce states of liking in strangers who have just met than to investigate and observe loving relationships over long periods. Consequently, research has given us a good deal of knowledge about the factors that initially attract two people to each other. The important factors considered by social psychologists are the following:

Proximity. If you live in a dormitory or an apartment, consider the friends you made when you first moved in. Chances are, you became friendliest with those who lived geographically closest to you. In fact, this is one of the more firmly established findings in the literature on interpersonal attraction:

Proximity leads to liking.

Exposure. Repeated exposure to a person is often sufficient to produce attraction. Interestingly, repeated exposure to any stimulus—a person, picture, song, or virtually anything— usually increases the possibility that we will like the stimulus more. Becoming familiar with a person can evoke positive feelings; we then transfer the positive feelings stemming from familiarity to the person himself or herself. There are exceptions, though. In

cases of initial negative interactions, repeated exposure is unlikely to cause us to like a person more. Instead, the more we are exposed to him or her, the more we may dislike the individual.

Similarity. Folk wisdom tells us that birds of the same feather flock together. However, it also maintains that opposites attract. Social psychologists have come up with a clear verdict regarding which of the two statements is correct: We tend to like those who are similar to us. Researchers including Prof. Susan Cloninger, believe that similarity leads to liking due to the following reasons: (1) Confirmation of worldview

(2) Knowledge of other's traits

(3) Inference that the other will like us (Reciprocity of Liking Effect)

Physical Attractiveness. Why do advertisers use beautiful showbiz personalities instead of reliable experts to endorse products? Why was Marian Rivera chosen to tell you that Maxipeel will help exfoliate your skin? Wouldn't a leading dermatologist do a more convincing job at something like that? This, and many other instances, show what researches have found in the way people perceive physical appearance: Beauty= Good. People presume that beautiful people also possess other desirable traits (halo effect), making beautiful people seem more likable.

The question stands however, ' what do we mean when we say physically attractive?' Some researches suggest that beauty has a strong cultural basis. Burmese women, for example, add neck rings throughout their lives as a sign of beauty. Some tribal African women put lip plates as a sign of beauty.

Many Filipinos prefer fair skin over their own morena(o) complexion while those with fair skin think chocolate brown skins are exotic.

Thin vs Voluptuous Figure

There are indications based on paintings and sculptures that during the Hellenistic and Renaissance periods in art, sexy and beautiful meant voluptuous. However, modern fashion and the media today tell you that changing times show a preference for thinner figures. According to some sociological research, in areas where food is scarce, people considered fuller-bodied women to be more attractive.

Childlike Features vs Mature Features

On the other hand, other psychologists and proponents of the theory of evolution have also proposed that physical attractiveness is determined based on man's unconscious desire for reproductive success, thereby, unconsciously on the look-out for indicators of health. For women, child-like features such as large eyes, small nose, full lips and a shorter and less wide chin (compared to forehead) are characteristics normally considered beautiful. Healthy skin and hair are also considered youthful and therefore, signs of beauty. For males, a strong jaw and broad shoulders indicate masculinity and maturity.

Proportion and Symmetry

Proportion is the harmonious arrangement or relation of parts within a whole. Symmetry, on the other hand, is the exact correspondence of form on opposite sides of a dividing line. The more proportioned and symmetrical a face is, the more physically attractive it is said to be.

Facial Contrast

In a research on sexual dimorphism, respondents were asked to determine whether the person on an image is male or female. In reality, the same face was presented twice to the participants, changing only the contrast in the image. The results are no surprise, however. The image with greater contrast was considered more feminine.

These factors alone, of course, do not account for long lasting friendships. Instead, these factors facilitate the development of relationships. For example, a survey by Psychology Today sought to identify the factors critical in friendships. In a questionnaire answered by some 40, 000 respondents, people identified the qualities most valued in a friend as the ability to keep confidences, loyalty, and warmth and affection, followed closely by supportiveness, frankness, and a sense of humor. While these are some traits that help maintain friendships, the factors for initial liking contribute to the creation of opportunities for people to eventually develop long and meaningful friendships with others.

On the other hand, another study by the same publication showed that life changes (77%), lack of reciprocity, betrayal and jealousy/envy were common factors for the end of friendships.

HOW DO I LOVE THEE? LET ME COUNT THE WAYS.

Whereas our knowledge of what makes people like one another is extensive, our understanding of love is more limited in scope and recently acquired. For some time, many social psychologists believed that love is as a phenomenon

too difficult to observe and study in a controlled scientific way. However, love is such a central issue in most people's lives that eventually social psychologists could not resist its allure.

Sternberg, one of the leading researchers in the field of interpersonal attraction and relationships cited three (3) basic components of love that, when, combined can produce different types of love.

commitment – the initial cognition that one loves someone and the long-term feelings of wanting and the decision to maintain love

intimacy-the feelings of closeness and relatedness

passion-made up of the motivational drives relating to sex, and physical closeness

These components are the ingredients to the seven common types of love according to sociologists and social psychologists particularly Sternberg:

Infatuation (only passion is present),

Liking or Friendship (only intimacy is present),

Empty Love (only decision or commitment are present),

Fatuous Love (passion and decision/commitment are present), Romantic Love (intimacy and passion are present),

Companionate Love (intimacy and commitment are present) and

Consummate Love (intimacy, passion, and decision/commitment are present).

Another researcher (Ainsworth) on the other hand, focused research on attachment styles. Ainsworth believed that how people handle their relationships with other people is influenced by their perception of their lovability and the trustworthiness of others. These perceptions are said to be based on experiences with childhood caretakers.

Secure Attachment- People with secure attachments are said to have responsive caregivers when they were young. Findings show that people with this kind of attachment often perceive themselves as likable and worthy. They also believe other people are generally trustworthy. Hence, being abandoned or left alone is not something to be concerned about.

Avoidant Attachment- People with avoidant attachment tend to have aloof caregivers. Although they perceive themselves as worthy and likable, they suppress intimacy because they do not trust others easily and prefer not to have intimate relationships.

Anxious/Ambivalent Attachment- These people are found to have been raised by inconsistent caregivers. They have the tendency to believe themselves unworthy and not very likable but they think others are trustworthy. They often strongly desire to be intimate with others but are anxious that others will not want them.

With the information given, many have been led to ask what makes two people successful in a loving relationship. Based on researches, particularly those of Nathaniel Branden, successful couples behave in the following ways:

1. They express their love verbally.
2. They are physically affectionate.
3. They express their love sexually.
4. They express their appreciation and admiration.
5. They participate in mutual self-disclosure.
6. They offer each other an emotional support system.
7. They express love mutually.
8. They accept demands or put up with shortcomings.
9. They create time to be alone together.

These characteristics are not equally present in every happy love affair or relationship. Even with a happy relationship, each partner does not exhibit them equally at all times. But it is strongly doubtful that anyone could point to a happy relationship that did not show most of these traits.

The Love Lab

Another series of researches by Gottman (for 10 years) has allowed him to identify some behaviors that could predict marital failure and loss of love in a couple. Dubbed as the Love Lab, Gottman observes three-minute videos of married couples arguing over a particular topic. He then analyzes their communication patterns as well as their behavior and physiology to determine which argument patterns are 'okay' and which ones are likely to destroy a marriage. Results show that

(1) expressing criticism—negative way of telling the other person of his shortcomings

(2) contempt—a combination of anger and disgust for another person

(3) defensiveness—extreme sensitivity to criticism

(4) stonewalling—delaying discussion of problems or blocking the possibility of communication

are patterns that are mostly seen in unsuccessful couples. On the other hand, softening arguments and using humor tended to help in keeping a marriage intact, based on results.