

Social Psychology

Lecture 13: Attraction and Intimacy

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In our previous lesson, we explored the foundational concepts of prosocial behavior, beginning with an examination of the distinct types of helping proposed by McGuire (1994). We analyzed gender differences in behavior to understand who is most likely to provide assistance and how situational contexts influence those choices. Additionally, we evaluated the major psychological and biological theories explaining why we help, focusing heavily on the roles of empathy, social norms, and evolutionary factors. Finally, we concluded with practical, evidence-based strategies designed to actively foster and increase prosocial behavior in everyday life.

In this lesson, we will explore the psychological and evolutionary dynamics of interpersonal relationships, beginning with the fundamental human need to belong and the core factors that spark initial attraction. We will examine how these attraction cues vary across cultural boundaries, looking at key global similarities and differences, while also analyzing what men versus women specifically look for in a partner through an evolutionary lens. Moving into the nature of romance itself, we will unpack the concept of romantic love, break down Sternberg's famous Triangular Theory of Love, and explore different psychological styles and languages of love that dictate how people express affection. Finally, we will transition to the long-term lifecycle of relationships by evaluating how bonds are maintained, the psychological roots of jealousy, the critical factors that help couples stay married, and the warning signs that ultimately lead to ending relationships.

At the end of this lecture, you will be able to:

1. Explain the evolutionary and psychological importance of human connection, and how the deficit of belonging affects well-being.

2. Identify and evaluate the key drivers of interpersonal attraction.
3. Compare how individualistic and collectivist cultures view romance.
4. Examine the evolutionary and psychological roots of jealousy, contrasting how different triggers affect partners.
5. Identify the core predictors of marital longevity.
6. Identify distinct ways individuals express and receive affection.

NEED TO BELONG

- A motivation to bond with others in relationships that provides ongoing, positive interactions.
- Examples: wanting friends; wanting romantic relationships

Belonging promotes well-being:

- improved health
- improved happiness

Ostracism and social rejection produce undesirable effects like:

- depression, anxiety, withdrawal
- self-defeating behavior
- treat others badly
- brain activity similar to physical pain

INTERPERSONAL ATTRACTION

- refers to positive feelings about another person.
- It can take many forms, including liking, love, friendship, lust, and admiration.

FACTORS OF ATTRACTION

1. PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS

- Research shows that romantic attraction is primarily determined by physical attractiveness.

- In the early stages of dating, people are more attracted to partners whom they consider to be physically attractive.
- Men are more likely to value physical attractiveness than are women.
- People's perception of their own physical attractiveness also plays a role in romantic love.
- **Matching hypothesis** proposes that people tend to pick partners who are about equal in level of attractiveness to themselves.

THE HOTTY FACTOR

- Physical attractiveness predicts dating frequency (they date more).
- They are perceived as healthier, happier, more honest and successful than less attractive counterparts.
- Some components of what is attractive vary across culture

2. PROXIMITY

- **Proximity** – the physical closeness between two people.
- People are more likely to become friends with people who are geographically close.
- The smaller the physical distance, the more likely the two people will experience repeat contact, and the development of mutual attraction.
- **Mere exposure effect** refers to people's tendency to like novel stimuli more if they encounter them repeatedly.
- **Study:** Festinger, Schachter & Back (1950)
- **Findings:**
 - Over ten times as many friendships developed between residents in the same building compared to those in different buildings. Within a building, residents were far more likely to be friends with people on the same floor.
 - A direct correlation between physical distance and the likelihood of friendship:
 - 41% of residents who lived next door named each other as friends.
 - 22% of those who lived two doors apart were friends.
 - 10% of residents living on opposite ends of the hall were friends .

- The reason that proximity and mere exposure are so important to attraction is that they lead to interaction. It is only through interaction that people learn enough information about each other to find out if they are a good match.
- Sometimes, though, interaction comes without proximity.
- Interactions through social networking sites like Facebook don't benefit from geographic proximity, but they can still have positive effects.
- Study: McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002
 - People who met online prior to meeting in person tended to report more favorable impressions of one another in comparison with pairs who first met in person. Notably, these close Internet relationships remained intact even two years later, demonstrating durability over time.

3. SIMILARITY

- People also tend to pick partners who are similar to themselves in characteristics such as age, race, religion, social class, personality, education, intelligence, and attitude.

4. RECIPROCITY

- The exchange of what we receive for what we get, which can include liking those who like us back.
- People tend to like others who reciprocate their liking.
- **Reward theory of attraction** says we like those who like us and give us rewarding experiences.

CULTURAL SIMILARITIES

- Researchers have found that people in many different cultures place a high value on mutual attraction between partners and the kindness, intelligence, emotional stability, dependability, and good health of partners.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

- People in individualistic cultures often believe romantic love is a prerequisite for marriage.

- In many collectivist cultures, people often consider it acceptable for family members or third parties to arrange marriages.

WHAT MEN VS. WOMEN WANT

Males choose females based on:

- good looks
- chastity

Females choose males based on:

- good financial prospects
- ambition and industriousness

EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVES

- Evolutionary psychologists point out that facial symmetry can be an indicator of good health, since many developmental abnormalities tend to produce facial asymmetries.
- A small waist-to-hip ratio, which produces an “hourglass” figure, indicates high reproductive potential.
- Men tend to be more interested in their partners’ youthfulness and physical attractiveness.
- Evolutionary psychologists think that this is because these characteristics indicate that women will be able to reproduce successfully.
- Women, on the other hand, tend to value partners’ social status, wealth, and ambition, because these are characteristics of men who can successfully provide for offspring.

ROMANTIC LOVE

KINDS OF ROMANTIC LOVE

1. Passionate love

- Involves absorption in another person, sexual desire, tenderness, and intense emotion.
- Identified by such behaviors as a couple gazing into one another's eyes and feeling like they're on an emotional “roller coaster”.
- First experienced in adolescence

- Often present at the beginning of a romantic relationship

2. Companionate love

- Calm and stable
- Characterized by shared values and life experiences
- Marked by a deep sense of trust tolerance of another person.
- Most often present in couples that have been together for a long time

HORMONES AND CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

- **Oxytocin** – a hormone that is important in female reproduction and that also influences social behaviors, including the development of long-term romantic attachments.
- **Testosterone** – male sex hormone that relates to liking particularly for passionate love.
- **Helen Fisher** used brain scans to show that love is the product of a chemical reaction in the brain. **Norepinephrine** and **dopamine**, among other chemicals, are responsible for excitement and bliss in humans as well as non-human animals.

TRIANGULAR THEORY OF LOVE

(Robert Sternberg)

Three main components of love:

1. **Passion** – physical attraction and sexual consummation
 2. **Intimacy** – psychological feelings of closeness and connectedness
 3. **Commitment** – both in the decision that one loves another and to maintain the love
- The amount of love felt by an individual depends on the strength of these components, and the kind of love depends on the strength of each component in relation to the others.

Kinds of Love:

- A. **Non-love** – absence of all three components.
 - B. **Liking** – intimacy without passion or commitment.
 - C. **Infatuation** – passion without intimacy or commitment.
 - D. **Romantic love** – intimacy and passion without commitment.
 - E. **Companionate love** – commitment and intimacy without passion.
 - F. **Fatuous love** – passion and commitment without intimacy.
 - G. **Empty love** – commitment without passion or intimacy.
 - H. **Consummate love** – combination of intimacy, passion and commitment.
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- ➔ Studies on Sternberg's theory of love found that intimacy most strongly predicted marital satisfaction in married couples, with passion also being an important predictor (Silberman, 1995).
 - ➔ Acker and Davis (1992) found that commitment was the strongest predictor of relationship satisfaction, especially for long-term relationships.

IS MARRIAGE THE END GOAL OF ROMANTIC LOVE?

- Some studies show that marriage benefits individual's economic well-being, the well-being of their children and their overall health.
- Other studies show that it's not marriage alone that predicts better health and well-being—that people must be satisfied with their marriages to reap these benefits.
- Studies suggest that single individuals generally have better health than their unhappily married counterparts.
- In the United States, many people cannot imagine being paired off for an arranged marriage, but some research shows that people in arranged marriages actually experience more satisfaction than those who chose their partners.
- Other research shows that there isn't any difference in satisfaction between people in arranged marriages versus those who married for love.
- Most of the research on marriage and long-term relationships has been on opposite-sex couples. Part of the reason for this are bans on same-sex marriages.

- A 2010 study suggests that the ban on gay marriage has had a negative impact on the mental health of gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals. The study found an increase in mood disorders, generalized anxiety disorder, and alcohol use disorders among gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals living in states with gay marriage bans. It's argued that, in addition to illustrating the ill effects of keeping people from the benefits of marriage, this study clearly demonstrates the negative effect of institutionalized discrimination (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2010).
- Other recent research looking at same-sex couples who are in civil unions or long-term relationships adds support to the idea that same-sex couples experience the same benefits from long-term relationships as do opposite-sex couples.
- A longitudinal study by Kurdek (2004) showed that same-sex couples were just as happy as, if not happier than, opposite-sex couples.

HOW ARE RELATIONSHIPS MAINTAINED?

♥ **Social Exchange theory**

- An economic model of human behavior in which people make decisions based on maximizing benefits and minimizing costs in a relationship
- Relationships that offer more benefits and fewer costs (including the work it takes to maintain the relationship) will naturally last longer and be more fulfilling than those that carry more costs and fewer benefits

♥ **Equity theory**

- Relationships are more satisfying when the ratio between the benefits and contributions is similar for both partners.

♥ **The Investment Model**

- **Investment** – those resources that have been devoted to a relationship that cannot be retrieved.
- If you've put a lot into it, it's harder to break it off.

- People generally more willing to work through problems if they have more invested in the relationship.

♥ **Exchange and Communal Relationships**

- **Exchange relationships** – are those in which partners expect strict reciprocity. Exchange relationships are usually limited to strangers and casual acquaintances, or between business partners.
- **Communal relationship** – are those in which partners expect mutual responsiveness to one another's needs. It exist between close friends, romantic partners, and family members. In these relationships, people seek to take care of one another without expecting anything in return.

STYLES OF LOVE

- **Ludus** – Ludic lover views love as a game, as play, as fun, and refuses to become dependeeent on any one person and does not encourage another's intimacy.
- **Pragma** – Pragma lover assesses his or her partner on the basis of assets and liabilities; economic security may be regarded as very important.
- **Eros** – Erotic lover is consumed by passion and romance; intensity of both emotional and sexual feelings dictates one's love involvement.
- **Mania** – the person feels intense emotional and sexual passion but is out of control; the person is possessive and dependent and must have and beloved; persons who are extremely jealous and controlling reflect manic love.
- **Storge** – storge love is calm, soothing, non-sexual love devoid of intense passion; there is respect, friendship, commitment, and familiarity; the partners care deeply about each other but not in a romantic or lustful sense.
- **Agape** – selfless and gving, expecting nothing in return; the partners are concerned only about the welfare and growth of each other; example: Parent's love

ENDING RELATIONSHIPS

“Four Horsemen of Apocalypse” (Proponent: John Gottman, 1994)

1. **Criticism** – Attacking your partner's personality or character rather than a specific behavior, often using "you always" or "you never" statements. Differs from a complaint, which addresses a specific action.
2. **Contempt** – Acting as if one is repulsed by their partner, including name-calling, mockery, sarcasm, sneering, or eye-rolling. This is the single best predictor of divorce.
3. **Defensiveness** – Protecting oneself by making excuses, denying responsibility, or cross-complaining. Often a response to criticism or contempt that escalates conflict rather than resolving it.
4. **Stonewalling** – Emotional withdrawal and refusal to communicate. The partner tunes out, turns away, or acts busy. More common in men and typically occurs after the other three horsemen have appeared.

Who Divorce?

Individualistic – *“What does my heart say?”*

Collectivist – *“What will other people say?”*

JEALOUSY IN RELATIONSHIP

- Males are more jealous when they imagined their partners flitting with someone powerful and successful
- Females are jealous when imagining their partners flirting with really physically attractive people

In a survey conducted by Buss, Larsen, Westen & Semmelroth, 1992)...

- 60% of men would be more upset by sexual infidelity
- 83% of women would be more upset by the emotional infidelity

Evolutionary psychologists suggests that...

- Men fear **sexual infidelity** because it could result in the use of their resources to raise another man's child.
- Women fear **emotional infidelity** because it threatens resources that support her children.

PEOPLE USUALLY STAY MARRIED IF THEY:

- Married after age 20
- Both grew up in stable, two-parent home
- Dated for a long while before marriage
- Are well and similarly educated
- Enjoy a stable income from a good job
- Live in a small town or on a farm
- Did not cohabit or become pregnant before marriage
- Are religiously committed
- Are of similar age, faith and education

LANGUAGE OF LOVE

- Words of Affirmation** – giving verbal compliments, words of appreciation, and encouragement. Example: A simple, sincere *"I love you"* or *"I'm so proud of you"*.
- Acts of Service** – doing things to ease the burden of responsibilities of the partner. Example: washing the dishes, fixing a broken latch, or cooking a meal
- Receiving Gifts** – a thoughtful gift shows them that you were thinking of them even when they weren't around.
- Quality Time** – giving the partner an undivided attention; just genuinely being present, having deep conversations, or sharing an activity together.
- Physical Touch** – it's about physical connection. It's the everyday, non-verbal affirmation of holding hands, a reassuring hug, or just sitting close together.

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