**Top 5 Classic Studies in the Psychology of Attraction**

**1. Similarity: Liking Others Who Are Like Us**

At the heart of attraction is the idea that we like being with people who provide rewarding and positive interactions. An early study on attraction assessed whether rewards were associated with how similar to people are. Researchers asked over 150 participants to read an questionnaire about attitudes (e.g., attitudes about premarital sex, television shows, etc.) allegedly completed by another participant, or what researchers refer to as a “bogus stranger,” then rate the attraction toward the bogus stranger. The researchers altered the scales to manipulate how similar the bogus stranger was to the participant and how many attitudes appeared on the scale. They discovered that proportion of similarity is more important than overall number of similar attitudes, such that it is more important to be similar on 7 out of 10 traits (i.e., 70%), rather than 30 out of 200 traits (i.e., 15%). This study laid the foundation for hundreds of subsequent studies into the importance of similarity in attraction. (Turns out that similarity is VERY important.)

*Byrne, D., & Nelson, D. (1965). Attraction as a linear function of proportion of positive reinforcements. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1(6), 659-663. doi:10.1037/h0022073*

**2. Friends in the Dorm: The Power of Proximity**

There is a saying that “you can choose your friends, but not your family.” However, it may be that your choice of friends isn’t totally within your conscious control either. In a classic study of friendship formation, researchers asked nearly 300 MIT dormitory residents to list their closest friends. The researchers then looked at where the listed friends lived in the dorms. When someone lived one door away, there was a 41% likelihood they were listed as a close friend. As the number of doors increased, that likelihood decreased such that those living four doors away had only a 10% likelihood of being listed as a close friend. This study demonstrates the importance that proximity, or being physically near others, has on relationship formation.

*Festinger, L., Schachter, S., & Back, K. (1950). Social pressures in informal groups; a study of human factors in housing. Oxford England: Harper.*

**3. The Bridge Study**

In this classic study, researchers left the laboratory to examine men’s attraction to a female they met under one of two conditions: on a high unstable shaky bridge or on a low sturdy bridge. In each condition, as the men crossed the bridge, they met a female experimenter who asked the men to tell stories about a set of ambiguous pictures. She also gave the men her phone number “just in case you have any questions”. The men who met her on the high bridge told stories with more sexual content and were more likely to call her than the men who met her on the low, sturdy bridge. The reason? Misattribution of arousal, or the idea that the high bridge created a sense of arousal that the men mistakenly thought was due to the female experimenter.

*Dutton, D. G., & Aron, A. P. (1974). Some evidence for heightened sexual attraction under conditions of high anxiety. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 30(4), 510-517. doi:10.1037/h0037031*

**4. Lots to Gain: The Power of Winning You Over**

Which is more attractive: someone that has always liked you or someone who first did not find you appealing but eventually became more positive? A clever study tested this by having college students engage in a series of meetings. The participant “accidentally” (it was actually an intentional part of the study) overheard the experimenter describe them in one of four ways: all positive; all negative; initially negative but becoming positive, or initially positive but becoming negative. As you would expect, participants liked the experimenter when the evaluation was completely positive, but, surprisingly, liked the experimenter even more when the evaluation was initially negative but became positive. This finding demonstrates the gain-loss theory of attraction, or the idea that winning over people who had an initial bad impression is more rewarding to us than someone who liked us all along.

*Aronson, E., & Linder, D. (1965). Gain and loss of esteem as determinants of interpersonal attractiveness. Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 1(2), 156-171. doi:10.1016/0022-1031(65)90043-0*

**5. What is Beautiful is Good.**

Most people assume that being physically attractive is a good thing, but this study shows just how good it can be. Undergraduates viewed pictures of men and women representing several levels of attractiveness. Based on the photograph alone, they rated the more attractive people as being more kind, outgoing, modest, sensitive, sociable, and interesting. But the positive perceptions didn’t end there. Participants also viewed more attractive people as having better jobs, better marriages, and better lives. These results demonstrate our strong bias toward beauty and the stereotypical beliefs we ascribe to more attractive individuals

*Dion, K., Berscheid, E., & Walster, E. (1972). What is beautiful is good. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 24(3), 285-290. doi:10.1037/h0033731*

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