

Chapter 1

I Want to Know What Love Is: The Ingredients of Liking, Attraction, Dating, and Successful Marital Relationships

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ABSTRACT

This chapter delves into the intricacies of liking, attraction, online dating, successful marriage and the roots of divorce to better explicate the rich, but complex development and maintenance of romantic relationships. More specifically, the chapter explores familiarity, similarity, gender, short and long-term dating intentions, trustworthiness, positive partner attraction, dominance, attachment security and other factors that pertain to attraction and liking. The chapter introduces The Cues Filtered out Theory, Social Presence Theory and Media Richness Theory, and delineates the benefits and limitations of online dating as it relates to computer-mediated communication. The chapter delineates the importance of similarity, communication and equity for successful relationships and the detriments of dissatisfaction and conflicts in unsuccessful relationships. Finally, the chapter shows how the Prepare/Enrich Program offers valuable advice for resolving conflicts, recognizing partner strengths, and creating a financially stable and productive life with one's partner.

INTRODUCTION

Astute theorists and relationship experts have asserted that love is an active, rather than a passive process. Love and relationships require constant work, communication, effort and persistence. Each aspect of relationships- from initial attraction and liking to online and offline dating and the successful maintenance of satisfying marital relationships demand attention, care and investment. This chapter will delve into the intricacies of liking, attraction, online dating, successful marriage and the roots of divorce to

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-2404-5.ch001

better explicate the rich, but complex development and maintenance of romantic relationships. More specifically, we will explore how familiarity, similarity, gender, short and long-term dating intentions, trustworthiness, positive partner attraction, dominance, attachment security and other factors pertain to attraction and liking. We will introduce the Cues Filtered out Theory, The Social Presence Theory, The Media Richness Theory, and will delineate the benefits and limitations of online dating as they relate to computer-mediated communication. We will then explore the ingredients of successful and unsuccessful marriages. We will learn of the importance of similarity, communication and equity and of the detriments of dissatisfaction and conflict in a marital relationship. Finally, we will examine how the Prepare/Enrich Program offers valuable advice for resolving conflicts, recognizing the strengths, and creating a financially stable and productive life with one's partner.

Dating: The Ingredients of Liking

How Exposure Affects Attraction, Similarity, and Familiarity

According to the Social Psychology literature, there are three principal components to attraction: proximity, physical attractiveness, and similarity (Myers, 2010). Proximity refers to geographical nearness and it refers to the fact that individuals who have greater access to one another based on location tend to have a greater propensity for liking one another. Physical attractiveness refers to the appearance of others we find attractive. While one's notion of physical attractiveness can be variable, depending on the person, his/her culture or time frame, society typically finds symmetrical and average faces to be the most attractive (Rhodes, Sumich, & Byatt, 1999; Singh, 1995; Thronhill & Gangestad, 1994, as cited by Myers, 2010). In addition, we typically assume that attractive individuals are happier, more sensitive, healthier, more socially skilled, and more successful, which thus increases how attractive they appear (Eagly, Ashmore, Makhijami, & Kennedy, 1991; Feingold, 1992; Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986, as cited by Myers, 2010). Lastly, similarity plays a large role in attraction, and thus in dating. Contrary to popular belief, opposites tend to retract, rather than attract (Myers, 2010). We tend to favor those who share similar attitudes, interests, values, and beliefs. Therefore, similarity increases our contentment whereas dissimilarity tends to increase our discontentment. Now that we have identified three components of liking, we can observe how these components interact with familiarity, gender differences, dominance, and personality types.

In addition to physical attractiveness, similarity, and proximity, familiarity can also enhance attraction. As humans, mere exposure to other individuals can cause one to develop feelings of attraction towards the familiar other. Many previous studies have shown this effect (Brockner & Swap, 1976; Saegert, Swap, & Zajonc, 1973; Swap, 1977, as cited by Moreland & Zajonc, 1982). This mere exposure effect can also increase the perceived similarity of other individuals directly or indirectly. Directly speaking, we more often than not assume that individuals we meet will share some of our own interests, beliefs, and values (Adams-Webber, 1977; Benjafield & Adams-Webber, 1975; Blanchard, 1966; Cloyd, 1977; Messe & Sivacek, 1979; Ross, Greene, & House, 1977, as cited by Moreland & Zajonc, 1982). Repeated exposure has an indirect effect on the perceived similarity of others via our need for mental consistency or consensual validation (Heider, 1958, as cited by Moreland & Zajonc, 1982).

To investigate how mere exposure affects attraction, similarity, and familiarity, Moreland and Zajonc (1982) conducted two experiments. In the first experiment, 64 male and 64 female undergraduate students served as participants. These students first received a pre-test survey, comprised of items from

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