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UNIT V

INTERPERSONAL ATTRACTION: CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

Internal determination and external determinants of attraction:

A. Internal determinants of attraction

- **The need to affiliate**

According to many researchers, the tendency to affiliate has a neurobiological basis. The need to affiliate with others is one of the main concerns of humans and is crucial to psychological well being. This also has an evolutionary advantage since interaction and cooperation with others helps in leading a better life and secure life.

The need of forming and maintaining a least quantity of interpersonal relationships among human beings is innately present. Therefore, unlike the Freudian view considering sexuality and aggressiveness as the major driving psychological forces, and the radical behavioristic views that considered every newborn as a blank tablet ‘tabula rasa’, the view of social psychologists is that human beings are driven naturally towards establishment and maintenance of belongingness. Hence the need to belong is found in some degree in all humans in all cultures, although there could be prevalence of individual differences in intensity and strength with individual and cultural variations in how people first express and then fulfill this need.

This would be pretty difficult or totally not possible for any culture to remove the need of belongingness. This innate need presumably has an evolutionary basis. Development, formation and maintenance of social bonds has both survival as well as reproductive benefits. Many of the survival tasks like searching for food and defending oneself against foes can be best achieved by group work or team co-operation.

- **Does affiliation desires increase with anxiety?**

Stanley Schachter, in late 1950s attempted to study whether anxiety leads to the desire for affiliation. He brought female college students into the laboratory and created a stressful event. Schachter introduced himself as “Dr. Gregor Zilstein” of the Neurology and Psychiatry Department. He then told the subjects that they would receive a series of electrical shocks as part of an experiment on their physiological effects.

In the “high anxiety condition”, participants were told that the shocks would be quite painful but would cause no permanent damage. In the “low anxiety condition”, they were led to believe that the shocks were virtually painless. In actuality, no shocks were ever delivered. The main intention was merely to make the participants believe that they would be soon receiving these shocks.

After hearing this information, the women were told that there would be a ten-minute delay as the equipment was being set up. The participants were told that they could spend time waiting either alone in a room or in a room with another participant in the study. The preference of the participants was the dependent variable in the study.

The results indicated that participants in state of higher anxiety intended to stay with others while waiting. Even when the participants were not allowed to communicate with one another, being with other individuals was preferred. This goes to show that the presence of others acts as a social distraction, taking the attention off from the anxiety. Also it helps in comparing one’s emotional reactions to the stressful event with another person.

It has also been found that cues that suggest possible harm, such as illness, danger, and disaster, seem to increase the need to affiliate with others. Adults who are able to form attachments are more supposed to reproduce than the one who fail to form them. Competition for limited resources also is a very powerful factor that leads to formation of interpersonal connections.

- **Individual differences in the need to affiliate**

There are individual differences in the need to affiliate. Generally individuals tend to seek an optimal amount of social contact. When this need for affiliation is not fulfilled, an individual feels hurt, sad and angry because he

feels that he does not belong. However, there are some people who show a dismissing avoidant attachment style in which they tend to avoid close relationships. Research by Carvallo and Gabriel (2006) showed that participants high in dismissing avoidant attachment style showed significant increases in positive affect and self esteem after learning that they have been chosen by other participants. This shows that even individuals who claim that they do not need others also have need for affiliation.

- **Influence of the situation on the need to affiliate**

Situational factors can also affect the need for affiliation. It is generally observed that after accidents or natural disasters, people come together to help and comfort each other. Schachter's (1959) work showed that participants expecting to get an electric shock preferred to be with others as compared to participants who did not expect to get a shock. This is because affiliation provides an opportunity to communicate, compare oneself to other people and make a decision. All this gives cognitive and emotional clarity to the individual.

- **Culture, gender, & affiliation**

The need for affiliation is also shaped by cultural variables. Research has shown that people living in individualistic cultures have a greater affiliation need as they have to develop relationships on their own. They must also learn to establish relationships in various social settings. Even though the relationships may be numerous in these cultures they may not be intimate. Hofstede's (1980) study of 22 countries showed a positive relationship between the degree of individuation in a culture and the affiliation needs of its people.

- **Role of affect in attraction**

Positive evaluations a person makes are lead by positive affect while negative evaluation a person makes are lead by negative affect. We tend to like people who make us feel good and dislike those who make us feel bad. Emotions also affect attraction indirectly. This is known as the associated effect of emotions. This happens when another person is simply present at the same time that when a person's emotional state is aroused by someone or something. We evaluate that person positively when we are in a good mood and negatively when in a bad mood. Examples of this phenomenon can be found in experiments on subliminal perception of pleasant versus unpleasant pictures. The explanation for this is based on classical conditioning. The relationship

between affect and attraction also has implications for social influence. The attempts at persuasion use the strategy of arousing positive mood states whether it is the advertisers or salespersons who want us to buy a particular product, or politicians who want us to vote for them.

B. External determinants of attraction

- **Proximity**

It is generally said that close proximity fosters liking. Two people are likely to be acquainted if there is physical proximity between them. Whether it is classroom seats, hostel rooms, residential flats or office desks, proximity is a very important factor in attraction. However, with the advent of internet and social media this may not stand to be very true but still it is a very important factor. Students sitting on adjoining chairs are more likely to become friends. According to Zajonc (1968) repeated exposure to a new stimulus results in an increasingly positive evaluation of that stimulus. Research by Moreland and Beach (1992) has shown that the more times a particular assistant attended class the more she was liked. With repeated exposure there is a decrease in negative emotions while an increase in positive emotions increase. However, it has been seen that the repeated exposure effect does not work when a person's initial reaction to the stimulus is negative.

- **Proximity is a very important factor in attraction**

It can be said that the best predictor of two people being friends is how far they live from each other. Close proximity has also been found to affect intimate relationships. Bossard (1932) conducted a study in which he plotted the residences of each applicant on 5, 000 marriage licenses in Philadelphia. A clear relationship was found between proximity and love. In another study, Festinger, Schachter and Back (1950) found that the closer people lived, the more friendly they became. They studied the development of friendships in married graduate students staying at the MIT in USA. After World War II, these couples were assigned randomly to 17 different buildings. Then the couples were asked to name three of their closest friends in the housing units. Results showed that two-thirds of couples' friends remained in the same building and about two-thirds were living on the same floor. Also people were about twice as likely to become close friends with somebody who lived next door to them (20 feet away) than to somebody who lived two doors down (40 feet away).

- **Physical attractiveness**

Physical attractiveness is a very powerful factor which determines our liking for others. It also influences interpersonal evaluations and mate selection. Researchers have found that most people assume that 'what is beautiful is good'. People have a strong tendency to attribute positive qualities to physically attractive people and negative qualities to physically unattractive people. Attractiveness is generally associated with positive traits, good interpersonal skills and high self esteem. This could be because such characteristics are developed because of the way other people have reacted to their appearance. That physical attractiveness is linked to positive traits is not always the case. In some cases, physical attractiveness is also linked with negative assumptions for eg. Beautiful women are perceived as materialistic.

Physical attractiveness is perhaps the most important predictor of interpersonal attraction. In a pioneering demonstration of this effect, college students attended a dance party with a randomly assigned partner they had not met previously (Walster et al., 1966). The major predictor of attraction was the individual's objectively coded physical attractiveness. Neural evidence has shown that reward circuitry in the brain is activated in response to viewing physically attractive faces. People tend to be attracted to physically attractive others even in friendships and platonic relationships and even threemonth-old babies prefer to gaze at the faces of attractive others.

- **What is attractiveness?**

Since attractiveness is such an important factor in relationships, it is quite important to understand as to who is considered to be attractive. One approach in understanding this is to identify individuals who are rated as attractive and find out what they have in common. Cunningham et al (1995) conducted a study on people from four different ethnic cultural groups and thirteen countries to rate the facial attractiveness of photographed women of different races and found a high degree of consensus on who was considered to be beautiful. The researchers found a preference for large, wide-set eyes, a small nose and chin and prominent cheekbones. They also found out that women judged as attractive can be put under two groups- those having childlike features and those having mature features. Another approach is given by Langlois and Roggman (1990). They used computer digitizing to combine multiple faces into one leading to a composite image. They reported that composite faces are rated as more

attractive than individual faces that were used to make that composite and that the more faces that are averaged, the more beautiful the resulting face. They also found that people are more attracted to symmetrical than to asymmetrical faces. Symmetrical faces are perceived as attractive because they are markers of good health and reproductive fitness. Singh (1993) reported that in general, men prefer a female body shape with a waist-to-hip ratio of about .70. This is because it signals good health, youthfulness and fertility. Women are found to prefer deep rather than high –pitched men’s voices because they associate them with masculinity and dominance.

Perceptions of attractiveness are also influenced by situational factors. For example, when research participants are shown pictures of very attractive people they rate a stranger as less attractive.

- **Other factors related to appearance that influence attractiveness**

Apart from the main factors affecting interpersonal attraction, there are many other factors. A very important factor that affects attractiveness is clothing. Other important factors are neatness, clothing color, perceived age, height, body type, modesty etc. Another very important determiner of attractiveness is a person’s first name.

Since physical appearance plays such an important role in interpersonal attraction, people make a lot of efforts to enhance their physical appearance. Even physically attractive people worry about their appearance. Most people experience appearance-rejection sensitivity. They worry about their appearance and fear that they might be rejected by others.

C. FACTORS BASED ON INTERACTION WITH OTHERS

- **Similarity**

Similarity plays a very important role in interpersonal attraction. There is a famous saying that states “birds of same feather flock together”. This finding was also confirmed in many studies. There is another saying that opposites attract. But there is strong evidence that similarity and not complementarity is the basis of attraction. It has been found that similar attitudes predict subsequent liking between students. Many researches have shown that attraction is determined by proportion of similarity i.e when the number of topics on which two people have similar views is divided by the total number of topics on which they have communicated, the resulting proportion is put in a simple formula –

the higher the proportion of similarity, the greater the liking (Byrne & Nelson, 1965). Rosenbaum (1986) proposed the 'repulsion hypothesis' as an alternative to this. According to this hypothesis, information about similarity has no effect; people are repulsed by information about dissimilarity. Many researches have been done on similarity-dissimilarity in relation to physical attractiveness; self-concept; religious practices and the findings indicate that similarity is a very important determinant of attraction. The effect of similarity-dissimilarity on attraction can be explained by the following theories:

- a. Balance theory (Newcomb, 1961; Heider, 1958) - According to this theory, when two people like one another and find out that they are similar to each other in some way, this leads to a state of balance which is emotionally pleasant. Whereas, when two people like one another and find out that they are dissimilar to each other in some way, this leads to an unpleasant emotional feeling which is also a state of imbalance which is emotionally unpleasant. In this case, they try to achieve balance by trying to change oneself or the other person, either by misperceiving the dissimilarity or by disliking each other.
 - b. An explanation as to why similarity is important is given by social comparison theory given by Festinger (1954). According to this theory, we compare our attitudes and beliefs with others because the only way to judge the accuracy of the attitudes and beliefs is when others agree with us. Therefore, we turn to others to obtain consensual validation.
 - c. Adaptive response to potential dangers (Gould, 1996) - According to this theory, we have strong inherited tendencies to fear and hate anyone who is different from us. This is important from an evolutionary perspective since it helps in survival and reproductive success but it may also become the basis of prejudice, discrimination and hate crimes.
- **Reciprocity**

Scholars have explored the reciprocity effect ever since Backman and Secord (1959) published their landmark study. Reciprocity effect refers to the tendency where people tend to be attracted towards others who tend to like them. In the 1950s, researchers argued that people are attracted to each other on the basis of complementarity of needs. According to this principle, we tend to like those who like us and dislike those who dislike us.

This emphasis on the reward potential of being liked by others is emphasized by interdependence theory and social exchange theory which states that the social approval of others is a “generalized reinforcer.” In one set of studies, Walster and colleagues (1973) sought to demonstrate that men tend to be attracted to women who “play hard to get” but their conclusion based upon six studies was that men are attracted to women who are easy for them to get but hard for other men to get. The above findings suggest only if the liking makes them feel special, people tend to be attracted to others who like them.

- **What do we desire in others?**

Cottrell, Neuberg and Li (2007) asked undergraduate students to rate 31 positive characteristics in terms of how important it is for their ideal person to have. Results showed trustworthiness and cooperativeness as most important factors followed by agreeableness and extraversion. Later, the researchers asked the participants to rate 75 traits as important for their ideal persons of different groups and relationships. Across all seven relationships, again trustworthiness and cooperativeness were rated as most important followed closely by agreeableness. Other traits were rated as more or less important depending on the kind of relationship the participant had with this imaginary ideal person.

- **Familiarity**

When people come across a novel situation, they try to assess the extent to which it signals danger. This helps in ensuring survival and well being. The preference for familiar others is hence adaptive. Additional evidence in support of the attraction-promoting effects of familiarity comes from research on the mere exposure effect, which suggests that people tend to experience greater attraction to familiar stimuli, including familiar people, than to unfamiliar stimuli (Zajonc, 1968).

This effect cannot be explained by other factors frequently confounded with familiarity, such as the quality of the direct experience, and it emerges even when the perceivers are not aware about gaining familiarity. In one interesting demonstration, female research assistants posed as students in a lecture course. By random assignment, they attended 0, 5, 10, or 15 of the 40 lectures (Moreland & Beach, 1992). Although these women did not interact with the students in the course, those students rated the women as more attractive as the number of classes the women attended increased, despite having no recollection of having ever seen the women.

- **Familiarity promotes attraction**

One of the main reasons why familiarity promotes attraction is that the humans have an inbuilt need to bond with others. In one of the studies, pairs of completely unknown strangers had an experience of greater attraction toward one other when they were randomly assigned to stare into eyes of each other for at least two minutes than if they were assigned to stare at one other's hands or were engaged in asymmetric eye contacts (Kellerman, Lewis, & Laird, 1989). The results of this give an idea that experience of brief intimate moments with the other individual causes sense of attraction towards that individual even if the choice of the individual was to not interact with the other individual.

D. INTERDEPENDENT RELATIONSHIPS

A very important feature of close relationships is interdependence. Interdependence refers to an interpersonal association between two people who consistently influence each other's lives. According to Ryff and Singer (2003), "quality ties to others are universally endorsed as central to optimal living."

- **Family**

The interaction between parents and children is of utmost importance because they are usually the first contact of the child. The reciprocal interaction between the baby and the parents results in a positive educational experience for both. Close relationships are also crucial since they influence the nature of later interpersonal relationships.

Bowlby (1969) studied the relationship between mothers and their children and developed the concept of attachment style. It refers to the degree of security an individual feels in interpersonal relationships. On the basis of his earliest interactions with adults, the individual acquires two basic attitudes. The first is an attitude about the self called self esteem. The behavior and the attitudes of the caregiver give information to the child whether he is important and valued or unimportant and unloved. The second attitude is interpersonal trust. This is based on whether the caregiver is perceived as trustworthy and dependable or untrustworthy and undependable. On the basis of these attitudes, a person Secure can have either of the four attachment styles:

- a. attachment style- a person with secure attachment style is high in both self esteem and interpersonal trust. Such individuals are able to form long lasting and satisfying relationships throughout their lives.
- b. Fearful-avoidant attachment style- a person with fearful-avoidant attachment style is low in both self esteem and interpersonal trust. They tend not to form close relationships. Even if they do have relationships they are usually unhappy ones.
- c. Preoccupied attachment style- a person with this attachment style has a negative selfimage and high interpersonal trust. They readily form relationships. They cling to others but expect to be rejected because of their negative self image.
- d. Dismissing attachment style- such individuals are high in self esteem but low in interpersonal trust. They fear closeness with others but they believe that they deserve good. An attachment style once formed remains constant throughout life. However, some researches suggest that some relationship experiences can lead to a change in attachment style.

- **Relationships with other family members**

Apart from relationships with the mother, relationships with other members of the family are also important. Research has shown the importance of fathers, grandparents and others in one's life. These relationships help the individual in further developing his interpersonal skills. The presence of other members can affect the individual in many ways. For instance, the sadness felt due to the absence of the father can be overcome by the presence of a loving grandfather.

- **Relationships between and among siblings**

Most of the people grow up in a family with atleast one sibling. Sibling interactions contribute in learning about interpersonal behavior. Sibling relationships often involve a lot of feelings like affection, hostility and rivalry. It has been found that children with no siblings are less liked by their classmates and are more aggressive. This could be due to the lack of interpersonal learning experiences.

- **Friendships**

During early childhood most of us have casual friendships which generally begin on the basis of proximity. Many a times such friendships can

blossom into a mature close friendship. Close friendship is a relationship in which two individuals spend a lot of time together and provide mutual emotional support. Women generally have more close friends as compared to men.

- **Romantic relationships**

Love is one of the most important emotions in our lives. The basic difference between love and friendship is sexual attraction or physical intimacy. Romantic relationships generally start with affiliation, proximity, and mutual liking. A very important feature of romantic relationships is interpretation of one's emotional arousal in the presence of another person as a strong attraction which includes some potential for love and sex.

- **Criteria for mate selection**

The factors affecting interpersonal attraction also play a role in mate selection. For instance, individuals tend to marry people who are similar to themselves on many dimensions like personality and physical attractiveness. Reciprocity too plays a role in mate selection not only with respect to mutual liking but in the sense that every relationship involves an exchange of resources. Partners are found to be happiest when they perceive the allocation of resources in the relationship to be fair. Evolutionary theorists argue that men and women have become genetically programmed to desire different traits in a partner. However, sociologists criticize evolutionary theory as they consider differential socialization of males and females leads to these differences.

- **Males**

Males are sexually attracted to female beauty as it is associated with fertility. Apart from beauty, men are also attracted to characteristics that indicate youth and health. Some of the important examples are a woman's hair; a face having bilateral symmetry; and bodily symmetry.

Females Women also pay attention to physical characteristics while seeking a romantic partner, but they pay more attention to a male's resources like economic and interpersonal power. This happens because reproductive success is enhanced by choosing a mate who is able to protect and care for the offspring. Apart from this, cultural factors also play an important role in mate selection.

- **Passionate love**

This form of love involves an intense and often unrealistic emotional reaction to another person. It usually begins with an instant overwhelming positive reaction to another person. The person is consumed with thinking about that person and nothing else. According to Myers and Berscheid (1997), sexual attraction is a necessary but not sufficient condition for being in love with another person. Apart from sex, passionate love also includes strong emotional arousal, the desire to be physically close and an intense need to be loved. According to Hatfield and Walster (1978), passionate love requires three factors to be present: 1. The person has to be exposed to love related images in songs, movies and images which motivate the individual to experience love. 2. An appropriate love object has to be present 3. There is physiological arousal that can be interpreted as love

However, many a time passionate love is too overwhelming and therefore cannot be maintained for long.

- **Companionate love**

Companionate love is based on close friendship between two people who are sexually attracted, are quite similar to each other, care about each other and exhibit mutual liking and respect. This kind of love is able to sustain a lasting and satisfying relationship.

Sternberg (1986) provided the triangular model of love. According to this model, a love relationship is made up of three basic components which vary in different couples: 1. Intimacy – the closeness and the strength of bond between the partners. Partners high on this component care for, value and understand each other. 2. Passion – this component is based on romance and sexual attraction. 3. Commitment – this relates to the decisions made regarding the person that one loves followed by a commitment to maintain the relationship.

When all the components are balanced it results in consummate love which is the ideal form of love.

- **Functions of romantic love**

Recent research has discovered that romantic love is a universal phenomenon. This shows that romantic love plays an adaptive role in reproductive success. According to this perspective, romantic relationships involve sexual reproduction and provision of mutual support and rearing of offsprings. Therefore it can be said that romantic love denotes:

1. love as attachment
2. love as caregiving
3. love as sexual attraction

- **Marriage**

Marriage is one of the most important events in the lives of most people. Marriage involves a commitment to remain in the relationship forever. However, for many people this commitment doesn't last long. Given the importance accorded to marriage as an institution, a lot of research focus has been directed to it.

Factors affecting marital happiness

1. Similarity – similarity is a very important factor which affects marital happiness. The more the couple in terms of interests, backgrounds, choices etc, the more the chances of marital happiness.
2. Dispositional factors: marital happiness is also affected by personality dispositions. For instance, it has been found that narcissists feel less commitment to a relationship (Campbell & Foster, 2002).

Attachment style has also been found to affect marital happiness. For instance, individuals with fearful-avoidant attachment style have been found to have less satisfying relationships. Other factors affecting marital happiness are neuroticism; anxiety, negativity; attachment style etc.

- **Minding relationships**

The minding theory of relationships (Harvey et al, 2002) describes how closeness in relationships may be enhanced. Minding refers to the reciprocal process of knowing each other which involves interrelated thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of the persons in a relationship.

- **Failure of relationships**

Though close relationships are an essential part of our lives, sometimes we fail to maintain them.

Some factors leading to the failure of relationships are:

1. Cost and benefit analysis – marital satisfaction occurs when benefits are maximized and costs minimized. However, in the opposite scenario, marital dissatisfaction occurs.
2. Finding out that there is lesser similarity between the partners than assumed before.
3. Conflicts and disagreements between the partners.
4. When love is linked with material success

- **Loneliness**

Despite the importance of close relationships in our life, some individuals fail to establish them. This results in loneliness which is an individual's emotional and reaction to having fewer and less satisfying relationships in comparison to what he or she desires. But there are some individuals who desire solitude. Loneliness produces feelings of depression, anxiety and pessimism. Lonely individuals are perceived as maladjusted by many. Loneliness is also associated with poor health.

Loneliness could be because of genetic factors; attachment style and failure to develop social skills. Dismissing and fearful-avoidant individuals generally fear intimacy and therefore have been found to avoid establishing and maintaining relationships. Loneliness can be reduced by many ways. One of the most important ways is to develop social skills. Major intervention processes include cognitive therapy and social skills training. Cognitive therapy helps in reducing the pattern of negativity and developing new thoughts and perceptions. In social skills training, the individual is provided with examples of socially appropriate behavior on videotape and then encouraged to role play. And then he is asked to practice those skills in real life settings.