Interpersonal Relationships



Learning outcome: Examine biological, psychological (cognitive) and social origins of attraction.

Biological level of analysis

**Introduction**

We are analysing the origins of attraction from a biological perspective. This level of analysis argues that there are physiological origins of many our behavior, and humans should be studied as biological systems. All animals, including humans, display much of the same behaviour when they are attracted to each other. Evolutionary theory argues that the purpose of attraction is to procreate, to ensure that one’s genes are passed onto the next generation. In addition to the evolutionary theory, anthropologists argue that the sense of love is induced by a biochemical cocktail.

**Evidence**

**Observations**

It is in the interest of the male to impregnate as many women as possible as this increases the chance of his genes being handed down as copiously as possible into the next generation.

Lies in the vast number of sperm a man is capable of producing in his lifetime whereas a woman may only produce 1 egg per month.

The best chance of her genes surviving into the next generation is for her to ensure healthy survival of the relatively few offspring that she is capable of producing during her reproductive lifetime

Males exercise and make sure that his partners are fertile so that he is unlikely to be “cuckolded” Thus he looks for cue that signify fertility and sexual faithfulness in heir partners.

**Study**

Hormones

Marazziti eg al. (1999)

Study in Pisa (Italy)

Studied 60 individuals: 20 men and women who had fallen in love in the previous 6 months, 20 others suffered from untreated obsessive compulsive disorder; 20 more were normal, healthy individuals who were not in love—these were used as controls.

By analyzing the blood samples from the lovers, Marazziti discovered that the serotonin levels of new lovers were equivalent to the low serotonin levels found in people with obsessive-complusive disorder

Researcher analyzed **serotonin** levels in the blood, not in the brain.

Winslow et al. (1993)-maintenance of relationships

Experiment on the role of vasopressin was conducte using praire voles

Animals tend to form stable pair bonds and have more sex than is necessary for reproduction, just as humans do

When male praire voles were given a drug that suppressed the effects of vasopressin, they lost their devotion to their mates and no longer protected them from potential suitors

Evidence that **vasopressin** plays an important role in males’ attachment and mating behavior

Experiments conducted on laboratory rats

Shown that when oxytocin is inhibited, new mothers reject their young

Yet when oxytocin was injected into female rats that had never mated caused them to demonstrate nurturing behavior towards other rats’ young

Most researchers found that oxytocin tends to deepen and intensify feelings of attachment

This is released in both men and women during touching and sex

Thus couples feel closer and more bonded

This is also released during childbirth and is believed that it helps to secure the bond between mother and infant.

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Brain activity

Fisher et al. (2003) used an fMRI to investigate blood flow in the brains of 20 men and women who were madly in love when they were asked to look at photographs of their beloved and of a neutral acquaintance.

The nature of the photographs was the IV in this experiment.

The participants first filled out a questionnaire, the Passionate Love Scale, with statements relating to how they felt about their relationship.

This was done in order to compare the brain activity of each participant to what they reported on the questionnaires.

Participants looked at the photographs of their beloved for 30s while they were scanned.

Then they had a filler task to distract them before they looked at the neutral photograph for 30s while being scanned.

This was repeated 6 times.

They showed the activity in the brain’s reward system, which is activated by a pleasant stimulus.

Found that the “brain reward system” was particularly active when the lovers looked at pictures of the object of their love, and they also found that the more passionate they were, the more active the brain’s reward circuitry was.

Thus supporting a correlation between the attitudes towards the lover and brain activity.

Buss (1996)

Suggests that jealousy may be biologically based

Found that women’s patterns of jealousy vary through their menstrual cycle

When oestrogen levels are low (during menstrual cycle), women appear to be more sexually jealous

When oestrogen levels are relatively high (during ovulation), women tend to be more emotionally jealous

Basis for Buss’s argument that human sexual behavior is grounded in the need to optimize the potential for reproduction, with the goal of the best genetic combination possible for the offspring, as well as maximizing parental care after birth

In the case of menstruation, the female worries that the male will seek out other females to mate with since she is unable to mate at the time

In the case of ovulation, since the potential for having a child is there, she fears the male will develop an emotional attachment to another female, and thus jeopardizing the security of her child.

Low (1990)

Carried out an analysis of 186 cultures and found a strong correlation between the number of parasites and population is exposed to (or the degree of pathogen stress and the degree of polygyny) that is when males have more than one sexual partner or spouse

As the degree of pathogen stress increases, the number of unmarried men increases

Buss (1993)

He found that women and men in regions of the world with high levels of pathogen stress rated the importance physical attractiveness of a prospective mate much more highly than individuals living in regions of the world with lower pathogen stress

Schackelford and Watson (1987)

Found that men with fewer symmetrical facial features were less physically active, manifested more symptoms of depression and reported minor physical problems

Men with asymmetric faces and body features also have higher basal metabolism rates and sometimes even lower IQ

**Biological Attraction Evaluation**

In the empirical support by Dunbar et al (1995), it indicated that men are more likely to be attracted to young and good looking female to be their partner. They used 900 personal ads in US newspapers and found that 42% of men sought a youthful mate compared with 25% of women; 44% males sought as physically attractive partner compared with 22% of women. Another support of the evidence from Davis (1990), suggested that women seek resources in their partner and men seek youth and beauty. Men emphasized their wealth and other resources, somehow women emphasis beauty, after looked through newspaper advertisements Davis considered the content of personal ads in newspapers. Women seek for good earning potential in men, whereas the men looking for a woman were looking for physically attractive younger women.

However, deterministic can be one of the weaknesses of evolutionary approach, people tend to pick their mates on the basis of biological and innate drives to find a mate and pass on their genes. This suggests that the evolutionary explanation does not account for freewill. Moreover, reductionist does not take account of many other factors that are involved in the formation of relationships and reduces relationship formation down to a simple and basic need to reproduce and pass on out genes to the next generation. It presumes heterosexuality which means people want children and that all relationships are sexual, but genes can not be passed on especially in homosexual relationships. So this suggests that the evolutionary theory is oversimplified in its outline of the formation of relationships. Also, ethical implication is considered as a weakness of the evolutionary theory. The theory can be seen to support gender stereotypes such as women stay at home to look after the children and it also endorses behavior that allows sexual privileges and freedoms for men that women are declined, so this theory does not protect females from psychological harm and simply promotes men fulfilling their sexual urges.

Cognitive level of analysis

Introduction

From a cognitive point of view, attraction can be seen as multiple thought processes, perceptions and social recognition, that an individual has to determine whether they like another individual or not. Researchers argue that an individual’s perception of similarity to another may be an explanation for attraction – whether it is age, religion, social class, cultural background, personality, education, intelligence, physical attractiveness or attitudes. Shared interests are also part of what attracts people to each other. Byrne (1971) argues that other people’s support for one’s own views and attitudes is rewarding because it validates one’s opinions and boosts self-esteem.

**Morry (2007) attraction similarity model**

**Evidence:** the individuals have beliefs about beliefs about relationships; people tend to see friends and partners as similar to themselves. Attraction, predicts perception of similarity, and the two seem to combine so that people experience psychological benefits as a result.

Markey et al. (2007) investigated the extent to which similarity is a factor in the way people choose partners. Using questionnaires, the research’s asked a large sample of young people to describe the psychological characteristics, values, and attitude of their ideal romantic partner without thinking of anyone in particular. Afterwards, they were asked to describe themselves. The results showed hat the way the young people described themselves was similar to that what their ideal partner looked like.

In the follow up of the study, the researchers used 106 young couples that had been together for a year. The 212 participants filled out a questionnaire about their own as well as their partner’s characteristics. The result was in line with the first investigation. The study confirmed that people want partners who are similar to them. This could explain why they perceive their partner to be similar, but perception and actual behaviors may not always be congruent at the end of the day.

**Evaluate:**

**Explains why people stay together long term**

**Two back up studies, evidence**

**Social level similarity**

**Doesn’t explain how opposite attract**

Strengths:

* Base on a large sample. And this enhances the validity

Weakness:

* Self reports liable to lack some reliability.
* Consisted of young Americans, not possible to generalize to other populations

Davis and Rusbult (2001)

Attraction can also foster similarity, with dating partners experiencing attitude alignment. This may mean that similarity is the result not the cause of attraction.

**The role of self-esteem in relationship formation**

**Evidence:** People with higher self-esteem take a more active approach in forming a relationship. The evidence for this is from an experiment by Kiesler and Baral 1970. They gave a group of men a fake IQ test and told half of them they "off the charts" and told the other half that their must have been a misunderstanding because their scores were so low, and to redo the test in the near future. After the scores were given, the individual participants were put in a waiting room for their pay and during that time an attractive female walked in. The ones with the self-esteem boost engaged in a conversation with the women quickly compared to the people who were given low-test scores

Social level of analysis

**Introduction:**

From a sociocultural perspective, there are several factors that influence attraction between individuals. To some extent, attraction is a connection between two people who can contribute positively to each others self-esteem. In 1931 psychologist Bossard studied how proximity can influence attraction, and in 1974 Segal studied how exposure and familiarity can become a factor in a relationship. And more importantly, the basis of formation of relationships is their culture and ethnic background, which was also investigated by Buss in 1994.

**Evidence:**

Buss (1994) gave 2 questionnaires regarding mate selection to more than 10,000 respondents from 37 cultures. There were many similarities in the responses: 36/37 cultures, women ranked financial prospects as more important than males. In all 37, men preferred younger mates, while women preferred older. 23/ 37 cultures, males rated chastity as being more important than women did.

The degree of agreement in sex differences across cultures led Buss view mate selection preferences as universal, arising from different evolutionary selection pressures on males and females.

There were also differences:

* USA: love ranked 1st
* Iran: Love ranked 3rd – education, intelligence, chastity ranked high
* Nigeria: Love ranked 4th – healthy, neatness, desire for home and children ranked high
* China: Love ranked 6th – healthy, chastity, domestic skills ranked high
* South Africa: Love ranked 7th – emotional stability, maturity, dependability ranked high

**Evaluation:**

Strengths are that the research is conducted through questionnaires and therefore can easily be replicated. It also keeps the participants anonymous and therefore not ethically unjustified. Because the participants are volunteers, they might be less compelled to have “screw you effect”. Also this research uses a wide range of culture and therefore is more reliable data.

A weakness might be that because it is anonymous you could have foreigner volunteers and therefore you have someone from one country with a different culture filling in the questionnaire. This would be a participant effects problem.

You also can’t supervise and therefore the participants might be some working together and getting the same answers to be socially correct. Also participants might want to favor the investigator or the opposite and have “screw you effect” by completely messing up their response.

Also added Festinger and Zajonc. Could mention how internet provides proximity.