Intimate Relationships

Close relationships
• Relationships are the centre of human existence.
• We have a fundamental need to affiliate with other people (Baumeister and Leary, 1995).
• Humans seem to be preoccupied with the idea of being in love or in close relationships.

Why are we preoccupied with close relationships?
• Lack of close relationships can lead to depression, loneliness, alienation, ostracism, anger and aggression.
• They are necessary for survival.
• We do many things to make ourselves more attractive to others.

Interpersonal attraction
• We sometimes have a ‘gut’ reaction to a person.
• Social psychologists have identified several key factors associated with attraction.
• These are based on physical factors and psychological factors.

Physical determinants of attraction
• Hatfield et al. (1966) asked people to complete personality and aptitude tests before being matched for a social dance.
• They rated people’s physical attractiveness and they found that only physical attractiveness mattered when it came to a second date.
• Examples of studies looking at the benefits of being good looking:
  1. More likely to get dates (Berscheid et al., 1971).
  2. Get better marks at university (Mandy and Sigall, 1974).
  3. More likely to be successful in a job interview (Dipboye et al., 1977.
  4. Likely to earn more money (Frieze et al., 1991).
  5. Likely to be treated better in the legal system (Downs and Lyons, 1991).

Physical attractiveness stereotypes
• Tendency to assume that attractive people possess other socially desirable traits in addition to their looks.
  This becomes self-fulfilling.
• The result is not always positive, it can lead to things such as stalking.

What is attractive?
• Wide variation but strong consensus both within and between cultures (Langlois and Roggman, 1990).
• Prototypical faces are more attractive than real faces.
• Closer to the mental prototype of a face and therefore more familiar and easier to process.

Evolutionary perspectives
• Facial symmetry.
  A prototypical face is a marker of biological ‘quality’ – a more diverse gene pool, a stronger mate, more fertile.
• Gender differences – women focus on status and men focus on youth and beauty.

Hourglass figures
• Fertility and status.
• When ovulating, women prefer the smell of t-shirts worn by symmetrically faced men.
• Ovulating strippers earn more tips – article.

The matching phenomenon
• People tend to be attracted to other who are about the same level of physical attractiveness as themselves – matched couples tend to have longer lasting relationships.