Delstar, 1999. The authors explain sales tools that can control the mind of a consumer through effective use of motivation, influence, and persuasion.

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See also: Attention; Attitude formation and change; Concept formation; Conditioning; Consumer psychology; Drives; Emotions; Media psychology; Motivation; Motivation: Intrinsic and extrinsic; Pavlovian conditioning; Reinforcement; Hierarchy of needs.

Affiliation and friendship

Type of psychology: Personality; Social psychology

Fields of study: Interpersonal relations; social motives

Affiliation is the tendency to seek the company of others. People are motivated and instinctually driven to affiliate for several reasons. Friendship is an important close relationship based on affiliation, attraction, and intimacy.

Key concepts
• affiliation
• attraction
• communal relationship
• complementarity
• consensual validation
• exchange relationship
• propinquity
• proselytize
• social comparison

Introduction

Affiliation is the desire or tendency to be with others of one’s own kind. Many animal species affiliate, collecting in groups to migrate or search for food. Human affiliation is not controlled simply by instinct but is affected by specific motives. One motivation for affiliation is fear: People seek the company of others when they are anxious or frightened. The presence of others may have a calming or reassuring influence. In 1959, research by social psychologist Stanley Schachter indicated that fear induction leads to a preference for the company of others. Further work confirmed that frightened individuals prefer the company of others who are similarly frightened to the companionship of strangers. This preference for similar others suggests that affiliation is a source of information as well as reassurance.

Social Comparison Theory

The value of obtaining information through affiliating with others is suggested by social comparison theory. Social comparison is the process of comparing oneself with others in determining how to behave. According to Leon Festinger, who developed social comparison theory in 1954, all people have beliefs and place importance on the validity of their beliefs. Some beliefs can be verified objectively by consulting a reference such as a dictionary or a standard such as a yardstick. Others are subjective beliefs and cannot be verified objectively. In such cases, people look for consensual validation—the verification of subjective beliefs by obtaining a consensus among other people—to verify their beliefs. The less sure people are of the correctness of a belief, the more they rely on social comparison as a source of verification. The greater number of people there are who agree with one’s opinion about something, the more correct one feels in holding that opinion.

Influences on Affiliation

Beyond easing fear and satisfying the need for information or social comparison, mere affiliation with others is not usually a satisfactory form of interaction. Most people form specific attractions for other individuals rather than experiencing mere satisfaction with belonging to a group. These attractions usually develop into friendship, love, and other forms of intimacy. Interpersonal attraction—the experience of preferring to interact with specific others—is influenced by several factors. An important situational or circumstantial factor in attraction is propinquity, which refers to the proximity or nearness of other persons. Research by Festinger and his colleagues confirmed that people are more likely to form friendships with those who live nearby, especially if they have frequent accidental contact with them.

Further research by social psychologist Robert Zajonc indicated that propinquity increases attraction because it increases familiarity. Zajonc found that research subjects expressed greater liking for a
variety of stimuli merely because they had been exposed to those stimuli more frequently than to others. The more familiar a person is, the more predictable that person seems to be. People are reassured by predictability and feel more strongly attracted to those who are familiar and reliable in this regard.

Another important factor in affiliation is physical attractiveness. A common stereotype about people who are considered physically attractive is that they are good and valuable in other ways. For example, physically attractive people are often assumed to be intelligent, competent, and socially successful. Attraction to physically attractive persons is somewhat modified by the fear of rejection. Consequently, most people use a matching principle in choosing friends and partners: They select others who match their own levels of physical attractiveness and other qualities.

Matching implies the importance of similarity. Similarity of attitudes, values, and background is a powerful influence on interpersonal attraction. People are more likely to become friends if they have common interests, goals, and pastimes. Similar values and commitments are helpful in establishing trust between two people. Over time, they choose to spend more time together, and this strengthens their relationship.

Another factor in interpersonal attraction is complementarity, defined as the possession of qualities that complete or fulfill another’s needs and abilities. Research has failed to confirm that “opposites attract,” since attraction appears to grow stronger with similarities, not differences, between two people. There is some evidence, however, that people with complementary traits and needs will form stronger relationships. For example, a person who enjoys talking will have a compatible relationship with a friend or partner who enjoys listening. Their needs are different but not opposite—they complement each other.

**Friendship**

Friendship begins as a relationship of social exchange. Exchange relationships involve giving and returning favors and other resources, with a short-term emphasis on maintaining fairness or equity. For example, early in a relationship, if one person does a favor for a friend, the friend returns it in kind. Over time, close friendships involve shifting away from an exchange basis to a communal basis.

In a communal relationship, partners see their friendship as a common investment and contribute to it for their mutual benefit. For example, if one person gives a gift to a good friend, he or she does not expect repayment in kind. The gift represents an investment in their long-term friendship, rather than a short-term exchange.

Friendship also depends on intimate communication. Friends engage in self-disclosure and reveal personal information to one another. In the early stages of friendship, this is reciprocated immediately: One person’s revelation or confidence is exchanged for the other’s. As friendship develops, immediate reciprocity is not necessary; long-term relationships involve expectations of future responses. According to psychologist Robert Sternberg, friendship is characterized by two experiences: intimacy and commitment. Friends confide in one another, trust one another, and maintain their friendship through investment and effort.

**Comfort in a Group**

Theories of affiliation explain why the presence of others can be a source of comfort. In Schachter’s classic 1959 research on fear and affiliation, university women volunteered to participate in a psychological experiment. After they were assembled, an experimenter in medical attire deceived them by explaining that their participation would involve the administration of electrical shock. Half the subjects were told to expect extremely painful shocks, while the others were assured that the shocks would produce a painless, ticklish sensation. In both conditions, the subjects were asked to indicate where they preferred to wait while the electrical equipment was set up. Each could indicate whether she preferred to wait alone in a private room, preferred to wait in a large room with other subjects, or had no preference.

The cover story about electrical shock was a deception; no shocks were administered. The fear of painful shock, however, influenced the subjects’ preferences. Those who expected painful shocks preferred to wait with other subjects, while those who expected painless shocks expressed no preference. Schachter concluded that, as the saying goes, “misery loves company.” In a later study, subjects were given the choice of waiting with other people who were not research subjects. In this study, subjects who feared shock expressed specific prefer-
ence for others who also feared shock: Misery loves miserable company.

The social comparison theory of affiliation explains the appeal of group membership. People join groups such as clubs, organizations, and churches to support one another in common beliefs or activities and to provide one another with information. Groups can also be a source of pressure to conform. One reason individuals feel pressured to conform with group behavior is that they assume the group has better information than they have. This is termed informational influence. Cohesive groups—those with strong member loyalty and commitment to membership—can also influence members to agree in the absence of information. When a member conforms with the group because he or she does not want to violate the group’s standards or norms, he or she has been subjected to normative influence.

Factors in Friendship
Studies of interpersonal attraction and friendship have documented the power of circumstances such as propinquity. In their 1950 book *Social Pressures in Informal Groups*, Festinger, Schachter, and Kurt Back reported the friendship preferences of married students living in university housing. Festinger and his colleagues found that the students and their families were most likely to form friendships with others who lived nearby and with whom they had regular contact. Propinquity was a more powerful determinant of friendship than common background or academic major. Propinquity appears to act as an initial filter in social relationships: Nearness and contact determine the people an individual meets, after which other factors may affect interpersonal attraction.

The findings of Festinger and his colleagues can be applied by judiciously choosing living quarters and location. People who wish to be popular should choose to live where they will have the greatest amount of contact with others: on the ground floor of a high-rise building, near an exit or stairwell, or near common facilities such as a laundry room. Zajonc’s research on the power of exposure confirms that merely having frequent contact with others is sufficient to predispose them to liking.

Mere exposure does not appear to sustain relationships over time. Once people have interacted, their likelihood of having future interactions depends on factors such as physical attractiveness and similarity to one another. Further, the quality of their communication must improve over time as they engage in greater self-disclosure. As friends move from a tit-for-tat exchange to a communal relationship in which they both invest time and resources, their friendship will develop more strongly and satisfactorily.

Love
Research on love has identified a distinction between passionate love and companionate love. Passionate love involves intense, short-lived emotions and sexual attraction. In contrast, companionate love is calmer, more stable, and based on trust. Companionate love is strong friendship. Researchers argue that if passionate love lasts, it will eventually transform into companionate love.

Researcher Zick Rubin developed a scale to measure love and liking. He found that statements of love involved attachment, intimacy, and caring. Statements of liking involved positive regard, judgments of similarity, trust, respect, and affection. Liking or friendship is not simply a weaker form of love but a distinctive combination of feelings, beliefs, and behaviors. Rubin found that most dating couples had strong feelings of both love and liking for each other; however, follow-up research confirmed that the best predictor of whether partners were still together later was how much they had liked—not loved—each other. Liking and friendship form a solid basis for love and other relationships that is not easily altered or forgotten.

Research
Much early research on affiliation and friendship developed from an interest in social groups. After World War II, social scientists were interested in identifying the attitudes and processes that unify people and motivate their allegiances. Social comparison theory helps to explain a broad range of behavior, including friendship choices, group membership, and proselytizing. Festinger suggested that group membership is helpful when one’s beliefs have been challenged or disproved. Like-minded fellow members will be equally motivated to rationalize the challenge. In their 1956 book *When Prophecy Fails*, Festinger, Henry Riecken, and Schachter document the experience of two groups of contemporary persons who had attested to a belief that the world would end in a disastrous flood. One group
was able to gather and meet to await the end, while the other individuals, mostly college students, were scattered and could not assemble. When the world did not end as predicted, only those in the group context were able to rationalize their predicament, and they proceeded to proselytize, spreading the word to “converts.” Meanwhile, the scattered members, unable to rationalize their surprise, lost faith in the prophecy and left the larger group.

Friendship and love are challenging topics to study since they cannot be re-created in a laboratory setting. Studies of personal relationships are difficult to conduct in natural settings; if people know that others are observing while they talk or date, they behave differently or leave the scene. Natural or field studies are also less conclusive than laboratory research, since the factors that have produced the feelings or actions that can be observed are not always clear.

Friendship has not been as popular a topic in relationships research as romantic love, marriage, and sexual relationships. Some research has identified gender differences in friendship: Women communicate their feelings and experiences with other women, while men’s friendships involve common or shared activities. Developmental psychologists have also identified some age differences: Children are less discriminating about friendship, identifying someone as a friend who is merely a playmate; adults have more complex ideas about friendship forms and standards.

As research on close relationships has gained acceptance, work in communication studies has contributed to the findings of social psychologists. Consequently, more has been learned about the development and maintenance of friendship as well as the initial attractions and bonds that encourage people’s ties to others and reasons, such as neglect, for friendships ending. Studies consider friendships at various life stages, including middle and old age. Cultural changes affect relationship patterns, particularly by shaping people’s attitudes and motivations regarding affiliations. Modern examples of how culture affects affiliation include reality television programs that test alliances formed specifically for those competitions and the fact that some adolescents and young adults have “friends with benefits,” with whom they are intimate but not romantic.

Twenty-first century psychology researchers studied childhood and adolescent friendships to gain new insights into the dynamics of those relationships. Psychologists focused on specific factors, motivating adolescents to develop and maintain friendships which had not been scientifically evaluated. Carnegie Mellon University researcher Vicki S. Helgeson and colleagues investigated how chronic health concerns affected friends. They studied relationships formed by healthy teenagers with diabetic girls and boys. The teenagers rated their friendships with individuals with similar or contrasting health status and from the same or opposite gender based on such issues as emotional support and conflict, specifying what they found appealing or not about those relationships. The researchers determined that health concerns did not significantly alter friendship patterns, although diabetic girls might desire more emotional support and appreciate more similar friends than their healthy peers would.

At the University of Missouri-Columbia, Amanda J. Rose evaluated survey responses by eight hundred female and male middle school students. The survey questioned students regarding their friendships, whether they divulged information about their problems, and if they had been anxious or depressed. The researchers determined that girls who shared their worries with friends benefited from strengthening those relationships but suffered emotional stress and depression if they fixated on problems too long, overanalyzing them and internalizing blame. Girls often became overwhelmed, concentrating emotions and energy on their problems instead of pursuing healthier endeavors. Rose referred to this dwelling behavior as co-rumination. Divulging their problems also enhanced friendships between boys. However, most boys did not experience similar psychological distress, perhaps because they did not blame themselves but accused others and external factors for causing conflicts in their lives.

**Digitized Affiliation**

By the early twenty-first century, digital technology altered how many people met and chose to pursue friendships and relationships or seek affiliation with groups. Although traditional psychological factors continued to shape social patterns, new technologies offered ways other than propinquity for people to encounter and contact others who shared interests or appealed to them. The Internet expanded people’s awareness of, and immediate access to,
other cultures despite physical distances. Communication technology—especially cell phones, Blackberries, and iPhones—provided people the ability to contact friends, either vocally or by texting and e-mail, regardless of location or time. These communication forms often affected social relationships: People sometimes focused on texting and responding to electronic messages rather than interacting with people around them. Researchers have considered the psychological impact of the interference of digital communication with school, work, or sleep.

People formed affiliations by participating in virtual chat boards, support groups, or other Internet forums. Many people joined Internet dating sites to meet potential romantic partners in their communities or elsewhere. Some people designed avatars to represent them when gaming online or responding to blogs to communicate with virtual friends. The anonymity of the Internet enabled people to portray themselves, often deceptively, in ways they might be unable to in non-Internet affiliations. Abrupt familiarity often quickened the formation of friendships and sometimes presented emotional and, occasionally, physical dangers.

Social networking sites, including MySpace and Facebook, transformed how people perceived friendships. Created in 2004, Facebook initially formed communities of university students before eventually allowing other users to join. By 2009, six million people, including one million in the United States, joined Facebook weekly. Most social network users chose to share their profile and information, including their romantic status, publicly instead of activating privacy settings. Each member acquired links to friends; in this case the concept of a friend was anybody the member approved who had requested to be a friend. Although most members had friends who were acquaintances, relatives, or friends of friends, other members acquired friends with whom they had no previous affiliation. In March, 2009, the average Facebook member had 120 cyber-friends.

Researchers recognize the value of digital data available on social networking Web sites as useful for psychological analysis of affiliation and friendship connections. Protocol for studying humans participating in online social networks is vague; institutions sponsoring research have established various demands for psychology researchers, including requiring some researchers to acquire site or membership permission. Researchers could study Facebook members’ public information to evaluate existing theories concerning popularity, self-esteem, identity, and relationships. For example, researchers at Harvard University and the University of California, Los Angeles used Facebook data to test a theory by Georg Simmel about triadic closure. Simmel hypothesized about friendships forming among an individual’s friends but was unable to acquire data to analyze his premise.

S. Shyam Sundar, of the Pennsylvania State University Media Effects Research Laboratory, studied how Facebook members’ friend quantities shape people’s opinions of those members’ possible psychological strengths or flaws. Eliot R. Smith, an Indiana University psychological and brain sciences specialist, secured a National Science Foundation grant to use Facebook data to interpret the processes involved in romances developing between strangers.

**Sources for Further Study**


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See also: Affiliation motive; Attraction theories; Computer and Internet use and mental health; Cooperation, competition, and negotiation; Group decision making; Groups; Intimacy; Love; Motivation: Intrinsic and extrinsic; Self-disclosure; Social networks.

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**Affiliation motive**

**Type of psychology:** Motivation

**Fields of study:** Interpersonal relations; motivation theory; social motives

The affiliation motive is the tendency for individuals within a society to form groups or associations that are recognized components of the society’s cultures. Affiliation may be based on cooperation, friendship, mutual interests, age, sex, protection, acquisition of physical resources, or social pressures to conform; affiliations transcend the usual kinship organizational structures of most societies.

**Key concepts**

- affiliation
- aggregation
- altruism
- association
- caste
- dominance hierarchy
- drive
- incentive
- kinship