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| **Factors Affecting Attraction: Self-Disclosure AO1** | | | |
| In the early days of a relationship, we love to learn as much as we can about our new partner, and the more we learn about them the more we seem to like them. By revealing ourselves to another person, we share our likes and dislikes, our hopes and fears, our interests and attitudes. We share what really matters to us. Our partner understands us better, and we them. | | | |
| **Social Penetration Theory**  Altman and Taylor’s (1973) social penetration theory states that self-disclosure is the gradual process of revealing your inner self to someone else, of giving away your deepest thoughts and feelings. In romantic relationships, it involves the reciprocal exchange of information between intimate partners. When one partner reveals some personal information they display trust; to go further the other partner must also reveal sensitive information. As they increasingly disclose more and more information to each other, romantic partners ‘penetrate’ more deeply into each other’s lives, and gain a greater understanding of each other.  It is a basic feature of romantic relationships. After all, it’s difficult to ‘bear one’s soul’ to a relative stranger. Doing so means that a relationship has reached a certain stage where such self-disclosure will be welcomed and – and hopefully – reciprocated. | | | |
| **Breadth and Depth of Self-Disclosure**  Altman and Taylor state that self-disclosure has two elements: breadth and depth. As both increase, romantic partners become more committed to each other. The onion analogy is used here to describe the superficial facts we reveal at the start of the relationship which are like the ‘outer layers’ of an onion. This is low-risk info we would reveal to anyone. The breadth of disclosure is narrow because many topics are ‘off limits’ in the early stages of a relationship. Revealing too much information might threaten the relationship before its even had a chance to get going.  As the relationship develops, self-disclosure becomes deeper, revealing more and more layers to reveal our true selves, and we talk about a wider range of topics, including those things that matter most to us. Eventually we reveal intimate, high-risk information e.g. painful memories and experiences, strongly-held beliefs, powerful feelings, even perhaps secrets (and maybe the odd lie). | | | |
| **Reciprocity of Self-Disclosure**  Reis and Shaver (1988) stated that for the relationship to develop (in breadth and depth) there needs to be a reciprocal element to disclosure. Once you reveal something close to you, hopefully your partner will respond in a way that is rewarding, with understanding and empathy and also their own intimate thoughts and feelings. So there is a balance of self-disclosure between both partners in a successful romantic relationship. Feelings are increased and the relationship deepens. | | | |
| **Sexual Selection AO3** | | | |
| **Support from Research Studies**  P: One strength of self-disclosure as a theory for factors affecting attraction is that there is supportive research.  E: For example, Sprecher and Hendrick (2004) studied heterosexual dating couples and found strong correlations between several measures of satisfaction and self-disclosure. Men and women who used self-disclosure (with partners who reciprocated) were more satisfied with and committed to their romantic relationship.  E: this is a strength because it supports the claim that to deepen the commitment of a relationship we must disclose personal information to our significant other, but in a way in which we feel it is safe to do so and that it will be returned and we will be shown appreciation for doing so.  L: Consequently, such findings increases our confidence in the validity of the theory that self-disclosure leads to more satisfying relationships. | **Real-Life Application**  P: One strength of self-disclosure a s a theory for factors affecting attraction is that there is real-life application  E: For example, Hass and Stafford (1998) found that 57% of gay men and women in their study said that open and honest self-disclosure was the main way they maintained and deepened their committed relationships.  E: This is a strength because this research can help people who want to improve communication in their relationships. If less-skilled partners e.g. those who tend to limit communication to ‘small-talk’ can learn to use self-disclosure then this could bring several benefits to the relationship in terms of deepening the satisfaction and commitment.  L: Such real-life application of the theory of self-disclosure in romantic relationships demonstrates the value of these psychological insights, and in turn increases the validity of the theory. | **Cultural Differences**  P: One weakness however of self-disclosure as a theory of factors affecting attraction is that it is culturally bias.  E: For example, Tang et al. (2013) reviewed the research literature regarding sexual self-disclosure (disclosure relating to specific sexual practices). They concluded that men and women in the USA (individualist) self-disclosed significantly more sexual thoughts and feelings than men and women in China (collectivist). Both these levels of self-disclosure are linked to relationship satisfaction in those countries.  E: This is a weakness because it shows that the prediction that increasing depth and breadth of self-disclosures will lead to a more satisfying and intimate romantic relationship is not true for all cultures. To a large extent, it depends on the type of self-disclosure.  L: As a result, self-disclosure theory is a limited explanation of romantic relationships, based on findings from western (individualist) cultures, which not necessarily generalisable to other cultures. | **Correlation vs. Causation**  P: However, one issue with self-disclosure a s theory for factors affecting attraction in romantic relationships is that it involves correlational research.  E: For example, Sprecher and Hendrick (2004) used a correlational analysis to investigate a potential relationship between satisfaction levels in a romantic relationships and self-disclosure.  E: this is a weakness because although it assumes self-disclosure does result in more satisfaction, a correlation does not tell us if this is a valid conclusion to draw. There could be a third variable such as natural attraction, or other forms of support such as financial or emotional that constitute the relationship deepening and being maintained.  L: as a result, not only the validity of Sprecher and Hendrick’s research which is questioned, but also the validity and explanatory power of the theory of self-disclosure in romantic relationships overall. |