

See also Communal Relationships; Equity Theory; Evolutionary Psychology and Human Relationships; Exchange Orientation; Norms About Relationships; Self-Disclosure

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RECIPROCITY OF LIKING

Reciprocity is a central feature of human relationships. The ethic of reciprocity is espoused by nearly every major religion, and human culture would grind to a halt if people did not routinely exchange goods, services, and other benefits with one another. *Reciprocity of liking* (also called *reciprocity of attraction* or *reciprocal liking*) is a particular type of reciprocity that refers to the tendency for people to like others who express liking for them. Reciprocity of liking is a key principle of attraction; at times, it has even been called a cultural truism. This entry reviews research and theory about reciprocity of liking.

Theoretical Explanations

Many major social-psychological theories predict the emergence of reciprocity of liking. When our interaction partners like us, they treat us in ways that maximize our rewards and minimize our costs. Interdependence Theory predicts that we will like people with whom we have such gratifying interactions. Indeed, the simple fact that another person likes the self is rewarding because it validates that the self has likable qualities. In

addition, people who like us often want to continue interacting with us in the future. Therefore, they may reward us by providing costly support in times of need, assuming that we ourselves might later reciprocate the support. In this sense, liking and helping are linked, and social exchange theorists suggest that, because individuals tend to reciprocate helping behaviors, this tendency should extend to the reciprocation of other benefits such as liking.

Balance theory, which emphasizes people's desire to maintain a cognitively consistent state, also predicts the emergence of reciprocity, at least for people who like themselves. That is, cognitive consistency is achieved when self-likers like those who like them. Intriguingly, cognitive consistency is also achieved when self-dislikers like people who *dislike* them. Reciprocal liking should therefore be less pronounced for individuals with low self-esteem, and, in fact, some evidence for this prediction has been found among married couples.

Finally, when someone likes us, it signals his or her willingness to provide care and support; Attachment Theory predicts that we will like such supportive individuals and provide care and support for them in turn. There is no shortage of theoretical explanations for the existence of reciprocity of liking.

Experimental Evidence

Researchers have tackled two central empirical questions regarding reciprocity of liking. The first question is causal: If A expresses liking for B, does this cause B's liking for A to increase? Psychologists first derived support for this prediction almost half a century ago. In an initial study, participants were led to believe in advance of a group discussion that certain members of the group (chosen at random by the experimenter) would probably like them. After the discussion, participants expressed more liking for the group members who they believed liked them. Other research found evidence for this causal pathway using the *bogus stranger* paradigm, in which participants did not meet face to face, but instead viewed questionnaire responses from another "participant." Participants' liking for such an unknown stranger correlates positively with the amount of liking the

stranger expresses for the participant on the questionnaire. In addition, the more attractive the stranger is, the greater the impact that stranger's liking has on participants' reciprocated desire. That is, when we find out that an attractive person likes us, we are especially likely to reciprocate that liking. Finally, there is also evidence that likers (i.e., people who like others, in general) are themselves well liked by participants. In studies in which targets express liking for many other individuals (e.g., politicians, cafeteria workers), participants tend to like those targets more than targets who express liking for few other individuals. In general, the experimental data support the prediction that liking causes liking: We do indeed like people more when we learn or infer that they might like us.

In romantic contexts, the possibility of not being liked is often especially salient. People are loath to risk romantic rejection, and experimental research has found that people are reluctant to initiate romantic overtures without some indication that the desired other might like them in return. For example, some evidence suggests that a small proportion of men (3 percent) would be willing to ask a woman who they desired out on a date if she had not indicated any interest in him. In a classic study conducted by Ted Huston, men who did not know for sure that an attractive woman would say "yes" to a date with him were less willing to risk asking her out (compared with men who were assured acceptance). For many people, some evidence of reciprocal liking is a critical precursor to initiating any overt romantic gesture.

Reciprocal Liking in Natural Social Contexts

There is a second empirical question regarding reciprocity of liking: Do the people we like in the course of our everyday lives tend to like us as well? As it happens, many early studies found that such reciprocity correlations (A's liking for B correlated with B's liking for A) were surprisingly low, often near zero. Reciprocity correlations did appear to be larger for participants who had known each another for a longer (compared with a shorter) period of time, but even in these cases, the correlations were small to moderate in magnitude. Adding to the confusion was the abundant

evidence that participants overwhelmingly *assume* reciprocity. That is, people tend to believe on average that their liking for someone is reciprocated, and many studies that professed to offer evidence for reciprocal liking used designs that offered strong evidence for assumed reciprocity, but little evidence for actual reciprocity of liking.

David Kenny, in developing the social relations model in the early 1980s, offered an explanation for the low naturally occurring reciprocity correlations. He noted that a simple correlation between A's liking for B and B's liking for A actually confounds two different kinds of reciprocity. The first is called *generalized* reciprocity: If A tends to like everyone on average, is A well-liked in return? In other words, there are individual differences in the tendency to like and to be liked, and these individual differences could be correlated and would therefore influence a simple reciprocity correlation. The second is called *dyadic* reciprocity: If A uniquely likes B (above and beyond A's tendency to like everyone and B's tendency to be liked by everyone), does B uniquely like A? When these two types of reciprocity are examined separately, the data typically reveal rather weak generalized reciprocity correlations, but strong dyadic reciprocity correlations. That is, there is only a weak tendency for likers to be well-liked (which contrasts somewhat with the experimental evidence described earlier), but people's unique liking for each other is likely to be reciprocated. Furthermore, it is the dyadic reciprocity correlation in particular that increases with the length of the relationship. When researchers calculated the simple correlation between participants' liking for each other, this procedure inadvertently combined a strong dyadic correlation with a weak generalized correlation. Once individual differences in people's tendency to like and be liked are separated from the unique liking that people experience for one another, we do find evidence for a healthy amount of (dyadic) reciprocity in people's naturally occurring relationships.

To separate generalized from dyadic reciprocity using the Social Relations Model, researchers must employ an intensive design in which participants report their liking for many other participants and are reported on many times. Until recently, all such studies had examined platonic liking; there were no data on naturally occurring reciprocity of *romantic* liking. However, with the advent of

speed dating and its emergence as a research method, scholars could now use the Social Relations Model to examine romantic reciprocity. Speed dating employs a design in which romantically available individuals meet one another on brief dates and decide whom they would or would not be interested in meeting again. One recent speed-dating study found evidence for dyadic reciprocity: Even after a brief 4-minute date, speed daters' unique romantic liking for one another tended to be reciprocated. Curiously, generalized reciprocity in this study turned out to be negative, indicating that participants who experienced strong romantic liking for the other speed daters on average were not well-liked. These data suggest that, within the romantic domain, only selective liking is reciprocated, whereas unselective liking is actually not reciprocated.

Finally, there is also evidence that reciprocal liking stands out for participants in their memories of falling-in-love experiences. People often report that they learned that another person romantically desired them shortly before developing affectionate feelings in return. In fact, reciprocal liking plays a more prominent role in people's falling-in-love memories than any single other variable, including similarity and the presence of desired characteristics (e.g., good looks, appealing personality) in the partner. Reciprocal liking also plays a prominent role in participants' memories of falling in friendship, although it is typically more pronounced in falling-in-love experiences. Although romantic liking may only be reciprocated when it is selective, as discussed earlier, it still seems to be a critical ingredient in sparking many, if not most, romances.

Desire for Reciprocal Liking

Reciprocal liking is one of the central principles of attraction, along with similarity, familiarity, proximity, and physical attractiveness. (Of course, this is not to say that reciprocity is unimportant as relationships mature. As mentioned earlier, dyadic reciprocal liking becomes stronger as relationship length increases, and couples that reciprocate negative affect are more likely to experience relationship dissatisfaction and dissolution.) But in the domain of initial romantic attraction, reciprocal liking exhibits a curious feature: People's perceptions of

reciprocal liking can fluctuate dramatically, even from one moment to the next, especially during the early stages of a potential romantic relationship. In other words, just minutes after a desired romantic partner signals that he or she might like us (e.g., by returning a phone call), the same desired partner could then signal that he or she might not like us after all (e.g., by ending the conversation abruptly). The other principles of attraction, such as physical attractiveness or proximity, probably only rarely fluctuate to such a degree.

Perhaps for this reason, people often exhibit an intense desire for reciprocal liking in developing romances. In her research on *limerence* (a term roughly synonymous with high levels of passionate love or infatuation), Dorothy Tennov determined that a central part of the falling-in-love experience is the yearning for one's affections to be reciprocated. People who are infatuated with a desired partner frequently engage in fantasies where the partner professes his or her love in return. In fact, in many cases, sexual contact is not the ultimate object of infatuated individuals' desires; instead, they fantasize about the reciprocation of affection that will alleviate any concerns that their love is unrequited and lead to an emotional union with the love object. The desire for reciprocity can be a consuming experience for infatuated individuals because they may frequently spend time replaying interactions with the desired partner in their minds, sifting for evidence of reciprocation. After all, reciprocal liking brings great rewards in this context, but because it can also prove ephemeral, it is frequently a source of considerable rumination for infatuated individuals. For infatuated individuals' emotional euphoria to be achieved, the reciprocity needs to be exclusive; that is, the infatuated individual also must find evidence that he or she is *selectively* desired by the love object. As reviewed previously, selectivity is a central component of reciprocal liking within the first few minutes of romantic encounters; its role may well intensify as an initial encounter grows into a full-blown infatuation.

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See also Bogus Stranger Paradigm; Infatuation; Initiation of Relationships; Interpersonal Attraction; Love, Unreciprocated; Reciprocity, Norm of; Social Relations Model; Speed Dating

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REJECTION

Rejection refers to being dumped, left out, snubbed, or otherwise made to feel excluded. People feel rejected when they are made to feel that they do not belong in a relationship or to a group. Rejection tends to have negative effects on behaviors, thoughts, and emotions. When people who are rejected feel that they are able to connect with others, the negative effects of rejection usually are eliminated. This entry discusses how rejection thwarts a fundamental need for relationships, summarizes different types of rejection people experience inside and outside of the laboratory, and examines the effects of rejection—both positive and negative—on behavior, thoughts, and emotions.

Rejection Thwarts a Fundamental Need

Most psychologists agree that people are motivated to have positive and durable relationships with other people. Roy Baumeister and Mark Leary refer to this motivation as a “need to belong” and suggest that it is among the strongest and most basic of all human needs. From this perspective, people naturally try to think, feel, and

act in ways that will earn them social acceptance and avoid rejection. Rejection thwarts the need to belong. As such, the consequences of rejection are consistent, strong, and mostly negative.

Rejection Inside and Outside of the Laboratory

Rejection is a common experience. People experience divorce, romantic breakups, or show romantic interest in another person only to have their romantic advances rebuffed. Some people seek membership in college fraternities and sororities, only to be told that they are not wanted. Children are left out of games on the playground, or they are told that they cannot sit by a person on the school bus. Rejection is a common theme in television and movies. Most reality television shows involve some sort of rejection. Some reality television shows involve contestants being voted off an island, whereas others involve contestants experiencing eviction from an apartment or house for various reasons. These examples provide at least some suggestion that rejection is a familiar experience for most people.

Psychologists use a variety of methods to study the effects of rejection. The methods psychologists use to understand rejection involve exposing people to situations that are considerably milder than the types of rejection people experience outside the laboratory (e.g., divorce, breakups), mostly because it would be unethical to expose people to those types of events for the purpose of research. Although laboratory manipulations often involve vague or impersonal experiences of rejection, the effects of these manipulations are quite strong. Listed next are the five most common methods psychologists use to study rejection. In each method, some people experience a type of rejection, and their responses are compared with those of people who do not experience rejection.

The first method (“group rejection”) involves some participants being told that no one in a group wanted to work with them, whereas others are told everyone wanted to work with them. In a second method (“lonely future”), some participants receive false feedback that they have a personality type in which they can expect to end up alone later in life, whereas others are told they can expect a future filled with social acceptance or negative events unrelated to their social relationships. A third