

friends wildly happy or unimaginably miserable, while our influence on people who are less close is not as great. Thus, our degree of influence on others is proportional to the closeness of the relationship. Second, we have more **frequent** contact with our close relationship partners and are thus able to impact their behavior more often than the behavior of less well-known others. Although our contact on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis may wax and wane, in general close relationships are marked by more frequent interactions. Third, close relationships are marked by a more **diverse** array of shared activities that open up various ways in which we can have influence. With our closest partners, for instance, we share activities of the intellectual, recreational, and sexual type. Finally, our close relationships are marked by the fact that we have had a longer time period across which we have been able to influence and be influenced. In other words, the **duration** of the relationship is longer.

So, what, then, separates close relationships like friends and romantic partners? Each of these relationship types has a strong, frequent, diverse, and durative pattern of interdependence. And we likely feel rather close to our friends—sometimes more so than we feel toward our romantic partner! Indeed, research shows that romantic relationships do not necessarily differ from close friendships in terms of emotional connection, shared activities, level of disclosure (and sometimes even sex; i.e., friends with benefits) (Mongeau et al. 2006). So what makes them distinct? Some argue it is just the label. According to Guerrero and Mongeau (2008), “one of the important characteristics that differentiates a friendship and a romantic relationship is the partners’ mutual definition for their particular entanglement. A romantic relationship, given this view, is a relationship labeled as such by partners” (175). Of course labels are important, and we do not argue here that there are no differences between friendships and romantic relationships. For instance, it is much more likely to have **compartmentalized friendships** (e.g., running buddy, tennis partner) than it is to segment romantic interests by type. For the purposes of this chapter, we make distinctions only when they are warranted by academic research. Thus, what follows in terms of outlining the nature of attraction and how people move from initial interactions to forming close relationships is applicable to both friendships and romantic relationships.

What Is Attraction?

When you hear the word attraction, what do you think of? More likely than not, you think about physical characteristics such as looks (e.g., body, face, attire) and appearance (e.g., well dressed, well groomed). But physical attraction is only part of what scholars call **interpersonal attraction**, that “constellation of sentiments which comprise the evaluative orientation of one person toward another” (Huston 1974, 11). Although the specific constellation of sentiments is far from agreed upon, a useful distinction can be found in the typology offered by McCroskey and McCain (1974) who discussed social, task, and physical attraction.

An individual’s level of **physical attraction** refers to his or her looks, that is, what you see on the outside. A large literature has found that physical characteristics are powerful contributors to whether we find another attractive. Moreover, people who are “good looking” also are believed to be more intelligent, popular, and happy, something that scholars refer to as the **halo effect**—attributing a range of positive attributes from the presence of just one (Dion, Berscheid, and Walster 1972). In addition, individuals who fit the culturally normative attractiveness profile tend to be treated better and have even been shown to earn more money than those less attractive!

So what makes a person physically attractive? Some research suggests that there are a few nearly universal signs of physical attraction. A few of these are:

- facial symmetry—when both sides of your face mirror each other
- body proportionality—the degree to which the distance from the navel to feet is proportional to the distance from the navel to the top of the head
- waist-to-hip ratio (0.70 for women; 1.0 for men)
- clear complexion
- large, clear eyes

While there are some universal aspects of attractiveness, however, much of what makes up physical attraction is culturally and time-period specific. As you grow up in a particular culture, you learn through socialization experiences and cultural artifacts (e.g., movies) what counts as attractive for that culture (see the discussion in Chapter Five on Physical Appearance). Likewise, what counted as attractive in 1913 is different from what is counted as attractive in 2013. In addition, there is some truth to the claim that “beauty is in the eye of the beholder” because at least some reasons that we find people physically attractive are not shared by many others in our own culture.

The second type of attraction is **social attraction** which reflects our perception of how easy the person would be to get to know and fit within our social network—that is, would we like to “hang out” with this person? This type of attraction is fostered by physical attraction, but it is much more than good looks. For instance, when we share common interests and have satisfying interactions with others our social attraction toward them is enhanced. By showing interest in what someone has to say and signaling warmth through various audible and visible acts of meaning (see Chapters Four and Five), you can boost your social attraction (Burgoon and Le Poire 1993); some research (Albada, Knapp, and Theune 2002) even shows that by being a positive and warm interactional partner you can boost your perceived physical attractiveness too!

The final type of attraction discussed by McCroskey and McCain is **task attraction** or a person's ability to accomplish goals, work seriously, and get a job done. People to whom you are attracted in a task-oriented way are those you think of when you are required to complete a group project at school or form a multi-person team within an organization.

A few other types of attraction that have been detailed include sexual attraction, relational attraction, and fatal attraction. **Sexual attraction** is the desire to engage in sexual activity with someone and is most closely related to physical attraction, but not isomorphic—that is, while you may want to hop into the sack with an attractive individual, you do not have this feeling for all physically attractive people (and unattractive people have sex, too). **Relational attraction** refers to the desire to have an intimate relationship with a person and is closely related to social attraction, though physical characteristics of people are important contributors to relational attraction. Finally, **fatal attraction** describes a phenomenon documented by Felmlee (1995) whereby those positive qualities that initially attracted us to someone are the same ones that eventually contribute to the breakup. For instance, while being in a relationship with your “opposite” may seem exciting at first, people with interests too divergent and dislikes too dissimilar are not likely to last. Indeed, we are much more likely to be attracted to and satisfied with individuals with whom we share interests, values, and beliefs, something true for dating relationships (Lou and Klohnen 2005) and friendships (Hays 1988). Sorry Paula Abdul, but opposites may not, in fact, attract.