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## The Rules of Attraction: Trust, Anxiety and Gratitude

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## Summary

The present dissertation investigates the emotional influences on social relationships. Together with my co-authors, we explored phenomena such as trust, anxiety and gratitude. In addition, we considered the influence of these emotional states on different kinds of interpersonal process: from initial interactions with unknown others to established interactions between spouses.

The first empirical chapter of the dissertation, Chapter 2, investigated the classic similarity-attraction effect (Byrne, 1972), whereby an increase in similarity is associated with an increase in attraction. We explored the question of similarity-attraction in a dynamic context of changing information, where new information can communicate more or less similarity than old information. We found that a change toward dissimilarity, where new information shows less similarity than the old information, resulted in a decreased attraction and trust to the target person (and vice versa). We also found that similarity can have a more symbolic meaning, that is: it communicates trust. As a result, similar others are attractive partly because they seem trustworthy.

Chapter 3 continued the exploration of the similarity-attraction effect, by investigating the cognitive bases of the effect, and the question of how anxiety moderates the effect. Five studies provided evidence that anxiety eliminates similarity-attraction effect: high-anxious participants favoured similar and dissimilar others to an equal degree, whereas low-anxious individuals preferred similar others (in line with the classic findings). Thus, even though high-anxious individuals correctly recognize similarity and show the same preference for similar others as low-anxious individuals; they have no preference for similar others on an explicit level. Chapter 3 offers an explanation of this effect of anxiety: we propose that the similarity-attraction effect is driven by an intuitive process. Anxiety, in turn, disrupts this intuitive process, by disconnecting individuals' evaluations from their intuitions.

Outside of the context of initial interactions with strangers, Chapter 4 focused on established marital relationships. More specifically, Chapter 4 examined the importance of gratitude in relationship maintenance. We propose that gratitude serves a dual function in close relationships, it is: a detector and a motivator of relationship maintenance behaviour. Importantly, we showed that gratitude functions on a dyadic level – it not only motivates the self to work for relationship maintenance, but it also leads to the same in the partner. What is more, our studies showed that gratitude sustains relationship maintenance over time, and independently of gender, relationships satisfaction and duration. Thus, in our studies, gratitude had the same effect on both: men and women; happy and less happy marriages; and marriages with longer and shorter history.

Thus, this dissertation included a diverse range of both experimental (Chapters 2 and 3) and non-experimental designs (Chapter 4). The present work should open the door to exciting, new research. For instance, more research is needed to explore whether new (dis)similarity information can change the evaluations of known others; or how the experience and expression of gratitude affect relationship functioning. All in all, throughout

this work we explored how emotional states can lead to attraction, and, potentially, to relationships; and how they can help in maintaining the already-formed relationships.