Module 40

Social Motivation: Affiliation Needs

Module Learning Objectives

40-1 Describe the evidence that points to our human affiliation need— our need to belong.

40-2 Describe how social networking influences us.

40-1 What evidence points to our human affiliation need—our need to belong?

The social stigma attached to obesity may bother an overweight person as much as, or more than, the health concerns. Why? We are what Greek philosopher Aristotle called *the social animal*. Cut off from friends or family—alone in prison or at a new school or in a foreign land—most people feel keenly their lost connections with important others. This deep *need to belong*—our *affiliation need*—seems to be a basic human motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Although healthy people vary in their wish for privacy and solitude, most of us seek to affiliate with others, even to become strongly attached to certain others in enduring, close relationships. Human beings, contended personality theorist Alfred Adler, have an "urge to community" (Ferguson, 1989, 2001, 2010). Our psychological needs drive our adaptive behaviors and, when satisfied, enhance our psychological well-being (Sheldon, 2011).

The Benefits of Belonging

Social bonds boosted our early ancestors' chances of survival. Adults who formed attachments were more likely to reproduce and to co-nurture their offspring to maturity. Attachment bonds helped keep those children close to their caregivers, protecting them from many threats. Indeed, to be "wretched" literally means, in its Middle English origin *(wrecche)*, to be without kin nearby.

Cooperation also enhanced survival. In solo combat, our ancestors were not the toughest predators. But as hunters, they learned that six hands were better than two. As food gatherers, they gained protection from two-footed and four-footed enemies by traveling in groups. Those who felt a need to belong survived and reproduced most successfully, and their genes now predominate. We are innately social creatures. People in every society on Earth belong to groups and (as Module 77 explains) prefer and favor "us" over "them."

Do you have close friends—people with whom you freely disclose your ups and downs? Having someone who rejoices with us over good news helps us feel even better about the good news, as well as about the friendship (Reis et al., 2010). The need to belong runs deeper, it seems, than the need to be rich. One study found that *very* happy university students were distinguished not by their money but by their "rich and satisfying close relationships" (Diener & Seligman, 2002).

> "We must love one another or die." -W. H. Auden, "September 1, 1939"

The need to belong colors our thoughts and emotions. We spend a great deal of time thinking about actual and hoped-for relationships. When relationships form, we often feel joy. Falling in mutual love, people have been known to feel their cheeks ache from their irrepressible grins. Asked, "What is necessary for your happiness?" or "What is it that makes your life meaningful?" most people have mentioned—before anything else—close, satisfying relationships with family, friends, or romantic partners (Berscheid, 1985). Happiness hits close to home.

Consider: What was your most satisfying moment in the past week? Researchers asked that question of American and South Korean collegians, then asked them to rate how much that moment had satisfied various needs (Sheldon et al., 2001). In both countries, the peak moment had contributed most to satisfaction of self-esteem and relatedness-belonging needs. When our need for relatedness is satisfied in balance with two other basic psychological needs—*autonomy* (a sense of personal control) and *competence*—we experience a deep sense of well-being, and our self-esteem rides high (Deci & Ryan, 2002, 2009; Milyavskaya et al., 2009; Sheldon & Niemiec, 2006). Indeed, *self-esteem* is a gauge of how valued and accepted we feel (Leary et al., 1998).

Is it surprising, then, that so much of our social behavior aims to increase our feelings of belonging? To gain acceptance, we generally conform to group standards. We monitor our behavior, hoping to make a good impression. We spend billions on clothes, cosmetics, and diet and fitness aids—all motivated by our search for love and acceptance.

By drawing a sharp circle around "us," the need to belong feeds both deep attachments and menacing threats. Out of our need to define a "we" come loving families, faithful friendships, and team spirit, but also teen gangs, ethnic rivalries, and fanatic nationalism.

For good or for bad, we work hard to build and maintain our relationships. Familiarity breeds liking, not contempt. Thrown together in groups at school, at band camp, on a hiking trip, we behave like magnets, moving closer, forming bonds. Parting, we feel distress. We promise to call, to write, to come back for reunions.

This happens in part because feelings of love activate brain reward and safety systems. In one experiment involving exposure to heat, deeply-in-love university students felt markedly less pain when looking at their beloved's picture (rather than viewing someone else's photo or being distracted by a word task) (Younger et al., 2010). Pictures of our loved ones also activate a brain region associated with safety—the prefrontal cortex—that dampens feelings of physical pain (Eisenberger et al., 2011). Love is a natural painkiller.

Even when bad relationships break, people suffer. In one 16-nation survey, and in repeated U.S. surveys, separated and divorced people have been half as likely as married people to say they were "very happy" (Inglehart, 1990; NORC, 2010). After such separations, loneliness and anger—and sometimes even a strange desire to be near the former partner—linger. For those in abusive relationships, the fear of being alone sometimes seems worse than the certainty of emotional or physical pain.

Children who move through a series of foster homes or through repeated family relocations know the fear of being alone. After repeated disruption of budding attachments, they may have difficulty forming deep attachments (Oishi & Schimmack, 2010b). The evidence is clearest at the extremes—the children who grow up in institutions without a sense of belonging to anyone, or who are locked away at home and severely neglected. Too many become withdrawn, frightened, speechless. Feeling insecurely attached to others during childhood can persist into adulthood, in two main forms (Fraley et al., 2011). Some display *insecure anxious attachment,* constantly craving acceptance but remaining vigilant to signs of possible rejection. Others are trapped in *insecure avoidant attachment,* feeling such discomfort over getting close to others that they employ avoidant strategies to maintain their distance.

Photodisc/Jupiterimages

The need to connect Six days a week, women from the Philippines work as "domestic helpers" in 154,000 Hong Kong households. On Sundays, they throng to the central business district to picnic, dance, sing, talk, and laugh. "Humanity could stage no greater display of happiness," reported one observer (*Economist,* 2001).
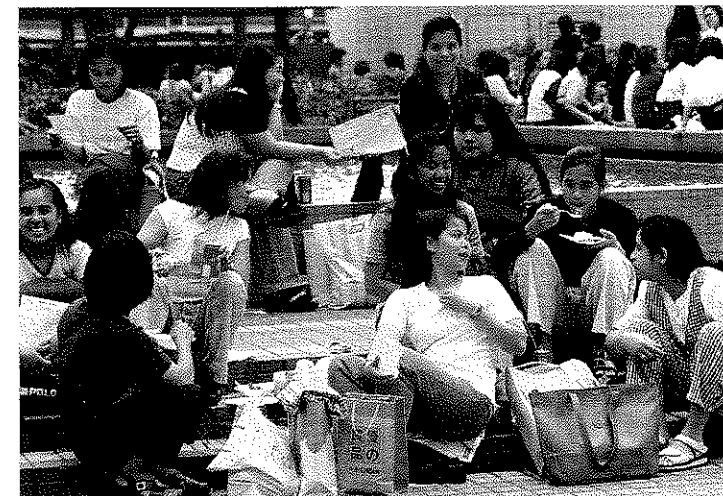
AP Photo/Vincent Yu

No matter how secure our early years were, we all experience anxiety, loneliness, jealousy, or guilt when something threatens or dissolves our social ties. Much as life's best moments occur when close relationships begin—making a new friend, falling in love, having a baby—life's worst moments happen when close relationships end (Jaremka et al., 2011). Bereaved, we may feel life is empty, pointless. Even the first weeks living on a college campus away from home can be distressing.

For immigrants and refugees moving alone to new places, the stress and loneliness can be depressing. After years of placing individual families in isolated communities, U.S. immigration policies began to encourage *chain migration* (Pipher, 2002). The second refugee Sudanese family settling in a town generally has an easier adjustment than the first.

Social isolation can put us at risk for mental decline and ill health (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2009). But if feelings of acceptance and connection increase, so will self-esteem, positive feelings, and the desire to help rather than hurt others (Blackhart et al., 2009; Buckley & Leary, 2001).

The Pain of Being Shut Out

Can you recall feeling excluded or ignored or shunned? Perhaps you received the silent treatment. Perhaps people avoided you or averted their eyes in your presence or even mocked you behind your back. If you are like others, even being in a group speaking a different language may have left you feeling excluded, a linguistic outsider (Dotan-Eliaz et al., 2009). In one mock-interview study, women felt more excluded if interviewers used gender-exclusive language *(he, his, him)* rather than inclusive *(his or her)* or neutral *(their)* language (Stout & Dasgupta, 2011).

All these experiences are instances of *ostracism*—of social exclusion (Williams 2007, 2009). Worldwide, humans use many forms of ostracism—exile, imprisonment, solitary confinement—to punish, and therefore control, social behavior. For children, even a brief time-out in isolation can be punishing. Asked to describe personal episodes that made them feel especially *bad* about themselves, people will—about four times in five—describe a relationship difficulty (Pillemer et al., 2007). Feelings of loneliness can also spread from person to person like a disease, through one's acquaintances (Cacioppo et al., 2009).

Being shunned—given the cold shoulder or the silent treatment, with others' eyes avoiding yours—threatens one's need to belong (Williams & Zadro, 2001). "It's the meanest thing you can do to someone, especially if you know they can't fight back. I never should have been born," said Lea, a lifelong victim of the silent treatment by her mother and grandmother. Like Lea, people often respond to ostracism with depressed moods, initial efforts to restore their acceptance, and then withdrawal. After two years of silent treatment by his employer, Richard reported, "I came home every night and cried. I lost 25 pounds, had no self-esteem and felt that I wasn't worthy."

To experience ostracism is to experience real pain, as social psychologist Kipling Williams and his colleagues were surprised to discover in their studies of *cyber-ostracism* (Gonsalkorale & Williams, 2006). (Perhaps you can recall the feeling of being unfriended or having few followers on a social networking site, being ignored in a chat room, or having a text message or e-mail go unanswered.) Such ostracism, they discovered, takes a toll: It elicits increased activity in brain areas, such as the *anterior cingulate cortex,* that also activate in response to physical pain (Kross et al., 2011; Lieberman & Eisenberger, 2009). That helps explain another surprising finding: The pain-reliever acetaminophen (as in Tylenol and Anacin) lessens *social* as well as physical pain (DeWall et al., 2010). Across cultures, people use the same words (for example, *hurt, crushed*) for social pain and physical pain (MacDonald & Leary, 2005). Psychologically, we seem to experience social pain with the same emotional unpleasantness that marks physical pain.

Enduring the pain of ostracism Caucasian cadets at the United States Military Academy at West Point ostracized Henry Flipper for years, hoping he would drop out. He somehow resisted their cruelty and in 1877 became the first African-American West Point graduate.
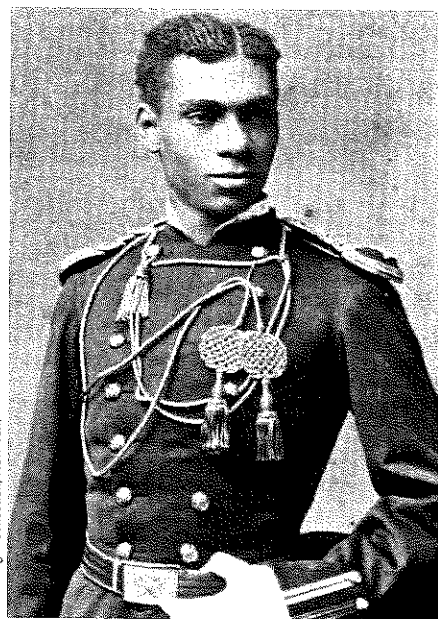
Social acceptance and rejection Successful participants on the reality TV show *Survivor* form alliances and gain acceptance among their peers. The rest receive the ultimate social punishment as they are "voted off the island."

Pain, whatever its source, focuses our attention and motivates corrective action. Rejected and unable to remedy the situation, people may seek new friends or relieve stress in a strengthened religious faith (Aydin et al., 2010). Or they may turn nasty. In a series of experiments, researchers (Baumeister et al., 2002; Twenge et al., 2001, 2002, 2007) told some students (who had taken a personality test) that they were "the type likely to end up alone later in life," or that people they had met didn't want them in a group that was forming. They told other students that they would have "rewarding relationships throughout life," or that "everyone chose you as someone they'd like to work with." Those excluded became much more likely to engage in self-defeating behaviors and to underperform on aptitude tests. The rejection also interfered with their empathy for others and made them more likely to act in disparaging or aggressive ways against those who had excluded them (blasting them with noise, for example). "If intelligent, well-adjusted, successful . . . students can turn aggressive in response to a small laboratory experience of social exclusion," noted the research team, "it is disturbing to imagine the aggressive tendencies that might arise from . . . chronic exclusion from desired groups in actual social life." Indeed, as Williams (2007) has observed, ostracism "weaves through case after case of school violence."

FYI

Note: The researchers later debriefed and reassured the participants.

Connecting and Social Networking

40-2   How does social networking influence us?

As social creatures, we live for connection. Asked what he had learned from studying 238 Harvard University men from the 1930s to the end of their lives, researcher George Vaillant (2009) replied, "The only thing that really matters in life are your relationships to other people." A South African Zulu saying captures the idea: *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*—"a person is a person through other persons."

AP® Exam Tip

Free-response questions on the AP® exam often ask students to apply psychological principles to real-life situations. It's easy to imagine a question that deals with social media.

Mobile Networks and Social Media

Look around and see humans connecting: talking, texting, posting, chatting, social gaming, e-mailing. The changes in how we connect have been fast and vast:

- Cell phones have been history's most rapidly adopted technology. At the end of 2010, the world had 7.1 billion people and 6.8 billion mobile cell-phone subscriptions (ITU, 2013). Asia and Europe have lead the way. In 2012 in India, 925 million people had mobile phone access—more than had a home toilet (Krishna, 2012; Mishra, 2013). American youth have kept up with the world: In 2013, 78 percent of 12- to 17-year-olds were cell-phone users (Pew, 2013).

"There's no question in my mind about what stands at the heart of the communication revolution— the human desire to connect." -SKYPE PRESIDENT JOSH SILVERMAN, 2009

- Texting and e-mailing have been displacing phone talking, which by 2009 accounted for less than half of U.S. mobile network traffic (Wortham, 2010). In Canada and elsewhere, e-mailing has declined, displaced by texting, Facebook, and other messaging technology (IPSOS, 2010a). Speedy texting is not really writing, said one observer (McWhorter, 2012), but rather a new form of conversation—"fingered speech."

- For many, it's as though friends, for better or worse, are always present. How many of us are using social networking sites, such as Facebook or Twitter? Among 2010's entering American collegians, 94 percent were (Pryor et al., 2011). With a "critical mass" of your friends on a social network, its lure becomes hard to resist. Such is our need to belong. Check in or miss out.

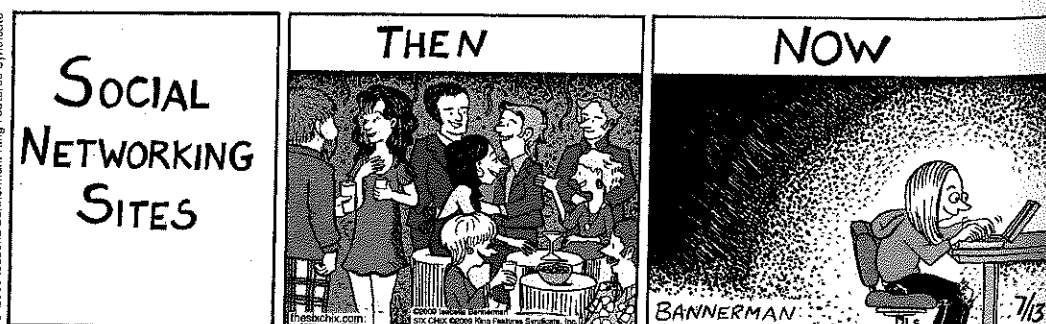## The Social Effects of Social Networking

By connecting like-minded people, the Internet serves as a social amplifier. It also functions as an online dating matchmaker (more on those topics in Module 79). As electronic communication has become part of our "new normal," researchers have explored how these changes have affected our relationships.

HAVE SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES MADE US MORE, OR LESS, SOCIALLY ISOLATED?

In the Internet's early years, when online communication in chat rooms and during social games was mostly between strangers, the adolescents and adults who spent more time online spent less time with friends (Kraut et al., 1998; Mesch, 2001; Nie, 2001). As a result, their offline relationships suffered. Even in more recent times, lonely people have tended to spend greater-than-average time online (Bonetti et al., 2010; Stepanikova et al., 2010). Social networkers have been less likely to know their real-world neighbors and "64 percent less likely than non-Internet users to rely on neighbors for help in caring for themselves or a family member" (Pew, 2009).

But the Internet has also diversified our social networks. I am now connected to other hearing-technology advocates across the world and perhaps you, too, have found a group of kindred spirits online. Despite the decrease in neighborliness, social networking seems mostly to have strengthened our connections with people we already know (DiSalvo, 2010; Valkenburg & Peter, 2009). If your social networking helps you connect with friends, stay in touch with extended family, or find support in facing challenges, then you are not alone (Rainie et al., 2011). For many, though, being alone is not the problem. If you are like other students, two days of social networking deprivation would be followed by a glut of online time, much as you would eat voraciously after a two-day food fast (Sheldon et al., 2011). Social networks connect us, but they can also become gigantic time- and attention-sucking diversions. For some research-based strategies, see Close-up: Managing Your Social Networking.

SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES   THEN   NOW

BANNERMAN

Managing Your Social Networking

In today's world, each of us is challenged to find a healthy balance between our real-world time with people and our online sharing. In both Taiwan and the United States, excessive online socializing and gaming have been associated with lower grades (Chen & Fu, 2008; Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010). In one U.S. survey, 47 percent of the heaviest users of the Internet and other media were receiving mostly C grades or lower, as were just 23 percent of the lightest users (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2010). The heaviest users may be almost constantly connected, sometimes even awakening during the night long enough to reply to a text but not long enough to remember it the next day.

If you're trying to maintain a healthy balance between online connecting and real-world responsibilities, experts offer these practical suggestions:

- *Monitor your time.* Keep a log of how you use your time. Then ask yourself, "Does my time use reflect my priorities? Am I spending more time online than I intended? Is my time online interfering with school or work performance? Have family or friends commented on this?"

- *Monitor your feelings.* Again, ask yourself, "Am I emotionally distracted by online preoccupations? When I disconnect and move on to another activity, how do I feel?"

- *"Hide" your more distracting online friends.* And in your own postings, practice the golden rule. Before you post,

ask yourself, "Is this something I'd care about reading if someone else posted it?"

- *Try turning off your mobile devices or leaving them elsewhere.* Selective attention—the flashlight of your mind—can be in only one place at a time. When you want to study or work productively, squelch the temptation to check for messages, posts, or e-mails. And disable sound alerts and pop-ups. These distractions can interrupt your work and hijack your attention just when you've managed to get focused.

- *Try a social networking fast (give it up for an hour, a day, or a week) or a time-controlled social media diet (check in only after homework is done, or only during a predetermined break).* Take notes on what you're losing and gaining on your new "diet."

- *Replenish your focus with a nature walk.* University of Michigan researchers have reported that a walk in the woods, unlike walking on a busy street, replenishes people's capacity for focused attention (Berman et al., 2008). People learn better after a peaceful walk that restores their fatigued attention.

"The solution is not to bemoan technology but to develop strategies of self-control, as we do with every other temptation in life." -PSYCHOLOGIST STEVEN PINKER, "MIND OVER MASS MEDIA," 2010

DOES ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION STIMULATE HEALTHY SELF-DISCLOSURE?

As we will see in Module 84, confiding in others can be a healthy way of coping with day-to-day challenges. When communicating electronically rather than face to face, we often are less focused on others' reactions, less self-conscious, and thus less inhibited. We become more willing to share joys, worries, and vulnerabilities. Sometimes this is taken to an extreme, as when teens send photos of themselves they later regret, or cyberbullies hound a victim, or hate groups post messages promoting bigotry or crimes. More often, however, the increased self-disclosure serves to deepen friendships (Valkenburg & Peter, 2009).

Although electronic networking pays dividends, nature has designed us for face-to-face communication, which appears to be the better predictor of life satisfaction (Killingsworth & Gilbert, 2010; Lee et al., 2011). Texting and e-mailing are rewarding, but eye-to-eye conversation with family and friends is even more so.

DO SOCIAL NETWORKING PROFILES AND POSTS REFLECT PEOPLE'S ACTUAL PERSONALITIES?

We've all heard stories of Internet predators hiding behind false personalities, values, and motives. Generally, however, social networks reveal people's real personalities. In one study, participants completed a personality test twice. In one test, they described their "actual personality"; in the other, they described their "ideal self." Volunteers then used the participants' Facebook profiles to create an independent set of personality ratings. The ratings based on Facebook profiles were much closer to the participants' actual personalities than to

their ideal personalities (Back et al., 2010). In another study, people who seemed most likable on their Facebook page also seemed most likable in face-to-face meetings (Weisbuch et al., 2009). Your online profiles may indeed reflect the real you!

DOES SOCIAL NETWORKING PROMOTE NARCISSISM? *Narcissism* is self-esteem gone awry. Narcissistic people are self-important, self-focused, and self-promoting. Some personality tests assess narcissism with items such as "I like to be the center of attention." Given our constant social comparison—our measuring ourselves against others—many social networkers can't resist comparing numbers of friends. (Evolutionary psychologist Robin Dunbar [1992, 2010] estimates we can have meaningful, supportive relationships with about 150 people— a typical size of tribal villages.)

Those who score high on narcissism are especially active on social networking sites. They collect more superficial "friends." They offer more staged, glamorous photos. And, not surprisingly, they *seem* more narcissistic to strangers viewing their pages (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008).

For narcissists, social networking sites are more than a gathering place; they are a feeding trough. In one study, college students were randomly assigned either to edit and explain their online profile for 15 minutes, or to use that time to study and explain a Google Maps routing (Freeman & Twenge, 2010). After completing their tasks, all were tested. Who then scored higher on a narcissism measure? Those who had spent the time focused on themselves.

* * *

We have seen that identifiable physiological mechanisms drive some motives, such as hunger (though learned tastes and cultural expectations matter, too). Other motives, such as our need for affiliation, are more obviously driven by psychological factors, such as the social rewards that come from belonging. What unifies all motives is their common effect: the energizing and directing of behavior.

Before You Move On

▶ **ASK YOURSELF**

Have there been times when you felt out of the loop with family and friends, or even ostracized by them? How did you respond?

▶ **TEST YOURSELF**

How might the evolutionary perspective, drive-reduction theory, and arousal theory explain our affiliation needs?

Answers to the Test Yourself questions can be found in Appendix E at the end of the book.

Module 40 Review

40-1   What evidence points to our human affiliation need—our need to belong?

- Our need to affiliate or belong—to feel connected and identified with others—had survival value for our ancestors, which may explain why humans in every society live in groups.

- Because of their need to belong, people suffer when socially excluded, and they may engage in self-defeating behaviors (performing below their ability) or in antisocial behaviors.

- Feeling loved activates brain regions associated with reward and safety systems.

- Social isolation can put us at risk mentally and physically.

40-2   How does social networking influence us?

- We connect with others through social networking, strengthening our relationships with those we already know.

- When networking, people tend toward increased self-disclosure.

- Working out strategies for self-control and disciplined use can help people maintain a healthy balance between social networking and school and work performance.

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. If you are trying to maintain a healthy balance between connecting with others online and a real-world perspective, which of the following suggestions should you follow?
   a. Monitor your feelings.
   b. Dismiss the notion of logging online time.
   c. Interact often with your more distracting online friends.
   d. Decrease physical activity.
   e. Try a social networking marathon.

2. Which of the following statements about mobile networks and social media is accurate?
   a. There are more home toilets in India than there are cell phones.
   b. Cell phones have been history's most rapidly adopted technology.
   c. Fewer than 75 percent of American youth are cell-phone users.
   d. Phone calling has displaced texting.
   e. Texting has declined in Canada and elsewhere because of e-mail.

3. Which of the following words or phrases best identifies our gauge of how valued and accepted we feel?
   a. Hope   d. Self-esteem
   b. Autonomy   e. Ostracism
   c. Competence

Practice FRQs

1. Explain three potentially negative effects of social networking.

Answer

1 point each for explaining any of the following:

   Isolates us from others
   Can become a time-sucking diversion
   Can become an attention-sucking diversion
   People may self-disclose too much
   Can make us feel emotionally distracted
   Other effects (use teacher discretion)

2. Explain three things you can do to manage your social networking.

(3 points)