A MATHEMATICAL FORMULA FOR ATTRACTIVENESS

Hatice Gunes and Massimo Piccardi (2006) took many different measurements of human faces. For example, they measured the distance from the top of the eyes to the bottom of the chin, the distance from the top of the eyes to the bottom of the nostrils, and so on. They compared these measurements to people's ratings of who was attractive. They found that most people agreed on who was attractive and that those rated as attractive had certain proportions to their facial structures. Although attractiveness is affected by cultural and surface norms, such as clothing and hair, there does seem to be a mathematical basis to decisions about who is attractive, and that basis seems to hold true across cultures.

Of course, people in your audience don't take a ruler to your face before they decide whether you are attractive or not. The unconscious is able to process these mathematical proportions in the blink of an eye, and it sends information to other parts of our brain that says whether this person is attractive and should be listened to.

Takeaways

* Get to know your audience as much as possible, and then see what you can do to make them feel you are similar to them in some way. You can do this through the things you talk about, how you talk, and how you dress.
* You are either "mathematically attractive" or you aren't, but whichever you are, you can use your clothing, posture, and facial expressions to appear more attractive.

82 SPEAKERS' BRAINS AND LISTENERS' BRAINS SYNC UP DURING COMMUNICATION

When you listen to someone talking, your brain starts working in sync with the speaker. Greg Stephens (2010) put participants in his research study in an fMRI machine and had them listen to recordings of people talking. He found that as people listen to someone talk, the brain patterns of both speaker and listener start to couple, or mirror each other. There's a slight delay, which corresponds to the time it takes for the communication to occur. Several different brain areas were synced. He compared this with having people listen to someone talk in a language they did not understand. In that case, the brains do not sync up.

SYNCING PLUS ANTICIPATION EQUALS UNDERSTANDING

In Stephens's study, the more the brains were synced up, the more the listener understood the ideas and message from the speaker. And by watching what parts of the brain were lighting up, Stephens could see that the parts of the brain that have to do with prediction and anticipation were active. The more active they were, the more successful the communication was.

SOCIAL PARTS LIGHT UP TOO

Stephens noted that the parts of the brain that have to do with social interaction were also synced, including areas known to be involved in processing social information crucial for successful communication, such as the capacity to discern the beliefs, desires, and goals of others.

Takeaways

* Listening to someone talk creates a special brain syncing that helps people understand what is being said.
* Because of this brain syncing, your audience is affected more strongly by listening to you than by simply reading slides or a report.

83 THE BRAIN RESPONDS UNIQUELY TO PEOPLE YOU KNOW PERSONALLY

Your Uncle Arden invites you over to watch the World Cup and tells you to bring some friends. When you get there, you see several people you know (relatives and friends of relatives) and some you don't know. It's a lively bunch, and over food and the game on TV, lots of topics are covered, including soccer and politics. As you would expect, you have similar opinions to some of your friends and relatives, and you disagree with some of them. You actually have more in common, in terms of soccer and politics, with some of the strangers than you have with some of your friends and relatives. When it comes to the people in the room, you have essentially four possible connections, as shown in **Figure 83.1**.

	Friends/relatives	**Strangers**
Similar	Friends and relatives that I have a lot in common with	Strangers that I have a lot in common with
Not Similar	Friends and relatives that I don't have a lot in common with	Strangers that I don't have a lot in common with

FIGURE 83.1 The four possible connections with the people at the World Cup party

The questions that Fenna Krienen (2010) conducted research on are these: Does your brain react differently to these four combinations? Do you make judgments about other people based on how similar they are to you? Or is it more important that they be close to you—either a close friend or a relative? And if there are differences, will they show up on fMRI brain scans? When you think about people that you don't know but that you feel similar to, do the same brain regions light up as though you were connected to them through kinship or previous friendship?

Krienen and her team tested these theories. They found that when people answered questions about friends, whether or not they felt they were similar to their friends, the medial prefrontal cortex (MPFC) was active. The MPFC is the part of the brain that perceives value and regulates social behavior. When people thought about others that they didn't know but had common interests with, the MPFC was not active.

PRESENT TO FRIENDS, NOT STRANGERS

The implication of Krienen's research is that your presentation will be more influential and better received if you are giving it to friends rather than to strangers. Anything you can do before your talk to try to get to know your audience is time well spent. If it is a small group, you might be able to meet with them in person or by phone before the actual presentation begins. If you are speaking to a large group, see if you can greet some people as they come in the door, or walk around and introduce yourself to the people who arrive early.

Facebook vs. Twitter and the MPFC

Jonah Lehrer (2010) writes about the difference between Facebook and Twitter. He says that Facebook is about friends and relatives that you know well, even if you don't think similarly about everything. Facebook activates the MPFC. Twitter is more about helping you connect to people you don't already know.

Takeaways

- People are "programmed" to pay special attention to friends and relatives.
- If the people you are presenting to know you personally, then they will react to your presentation in a different way than people who do not know you.
- If you can, take some time before your presentation to get to know people in your audience. Although this doesn't make them your close personal friend, the more that people know you, the more effective you will be as a presenter.

84 PEOPLE WANT YOU TO CONTROL THE ROOM

At one point in my career I managed a team of ten instructors. They were all different, and all of them were excellent teachers. Two instructors, however, consistently got rave reviews—consistently better reviews than all the others. I began to wonder why. After observing most of the instructors, the quick answer came to me. The two especially good and popular instructors had the best control of the room. They projected authority and confidence, and they purposely took actions that established and maintained their control of the room. They were teaching multiple-day classes, and having control of the room was critical to the ongoing success of the class. The students (most of them designers and programmers) were responding positively to the instructor's control of the room.

Even if you aren't teaching a multiple-day class but are instead giving a 20-minute presentation, having control of the room is critical. If your audience feels that no one is in control of the presentation, they will begin to feel nervous and antsy. Your audience is actually hoping you will be in charge of the room and will back you up.

CONTROL VS. COLLABORATION

You might object to the idea of having control of the room. But remember that I'm talking about a presentation or speech, not about running a meeting. What about interaction? What about collaboration? The truth is that someone needs to be in charge, and if you want your presentation to go well, you'd better make sure it's you who is in control. You can still have interaction and lots of collaboration, but you should have them when and how you believe it's best.

HOW YOU GAIN AND KEEP CONTROL

There is no single thing you do that establishes and keeps control of the presentation. It is a series of continual and small actions that unconsciously and consciously convey that you are in charge, including

- ★ Using the gestures, vocal cues, and physical postures that have been covered in this chapter. When you are strong and confident, people believe you are in charge.
- ★ Starting and ending the session on time.
- ★ Pacing your presentation so that you do not appear to be rushing toward the end.
- ★ Respectfully controlling people who interrupt, ask a lot of questions, or ramble on when they ask a question.
- ★ Taking breaks at prescribed times (if you are giving a multi-hour presentation).
- ★ Starting your presentation on time after breaks.

Takeaways

- * People hope that someone is in charge, and they hope that it is you.
- * Come early to your room (or to the teleconference, if it is an online presentation) so that you can be set up ahead of time. When your audience joins you, you should be ready for them—not still setting up or getting things prepared.
- * Don't be afraid to be strong in dealing with problems or interruptions.
- * Practice, practice, practice—when you know your presentation well, you are confident, which communicates that you are in control.
- * Stand whenever possible. Even if it's a small presentation to just a few people in a conference room, you should stand during the presentation. Standing says, "I have the floor. I am in charge here."