

Attraction and Rejection (Part 3)

Wan Noraini bt Wan Razab

The need to belong is defined as the desire to form and maintain close, lasting relationships with some other individuals (Ainsworth, 1989; Axerold & Hamilton, 1981; Barash, 1977; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Bowlby, 1969; Buss, 1990, 1991; Hogan, Jones & Cheek, 1985; Moreland, 1987). Without this motive, people might just live alone; they would certainly be willing to abandon a partner as soon as he or she became annoying. The need to belong drives people to affiliate, commit, and remain together, and it makes them reluctant to live alone. People usually form relationships easily and readily, such as with neighbors and work colleagues. They are reluctant to let relationships end, even if they do not see any clear purpose in continuing the relationship. For example, when workers at a corporation go through a training group exercise in which they meet regularly for a set period of time, the group typically resists its impending breakup, such as by planning to remain in touch with each other and even planning reunions (Egan, 1970; Lacoursiere, 1980; Lieberman, Yalom & Miles, 1973). The group's purpose will be over, and in fact most of these planned reunions never take place, but nobody wants to admit that the interpersonal connections are coming to an end. By the same token, when people break off a romantic relationship, they usually say that they want to preserve some parts of their intimate connection despite terminating the romantic connection. "Let's just be friend" is the common breakup line, though in reality most ex-lovers do not sustain close friendships with each other (Baumeister & Wotman, 1992). Promising to remain friends is usually just a way to avoid the reality that a social bond is about to be broken.

Indeed, people are often reluctant to put an end even to bad relationships. People remain in relationships even with violent, abusive partners. This has been an enduring puzzle to psychologists and a source of vexation to therapists (Andrews, 1989; Barnett & Gotlibb, 1988; Coyne, 1976; Coyne & Gotlib, 1983; Coyne, Kahn & Gotlib, 1987; Hooley, Orley & Teasdale, 1986; Howes & Hokanson, 1979; Marks & Hammen, 1982; Strube, 1988; Swann & Predmore, 1985; Swann, Wenzlaff, Krull & Pelham, 1992; Weissman & Paykel, 1974). a breathtaking variety of theories have been put forward to explain why women will stay with men who

humiliate or beat them, though it has been hard to prove any one of these theories correct, and many views (such as that women have masochistic desire to be beaten and abused) have been discredited. The broadest and simplest explanation is that breaking off relationships goes against the basic tendencies of human nature. We are designed to connect, not to separate and even if the relationship is bad, there is a deeply rooted impulse not to terminate it.

The need to belong has two parts (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). First, people want some kind of regular social contacts. Of course, not all interactions are equally satisfying. Aversive social contacts, such as fighting and arguing, do not satisfy the need to belong. Positive social contacts are better, though neutral ones, such as watching television together or simply having breakfast together, are also satisfying. Second, people want the stable framework of some ongoing relationship in which the people share a mutual concern for each other.

Having either of these without the other produces partial satisfaction. For example, people who have many encounters with other people but without the relationship framework are better off than people who are fully isolated, but they are not fully satisfied either. Imagine being a tollbooth collector who interacts with people all day long but never sees anyone for more than a minute or two and mostly just says the same few words over and over. The same goes for telemarketers, who speak to many people on the phone but without any real connection. Prostitutes have rather intimate interactions with many individuals, but again without the context of an ongoing relationship these are not satisfying (Adler, 1980; McLeod, 1982; Symanski, 1980). Conversely, people who have the stable context without the frequent interaction also suffer from the lack of face-to-face contact, even while they may treasure the relationship. Long distance relationships or so-called commuter marriages reveal this pattern: the partners place great value on the bond they have with their far-off lover, but they yearn to spend more time together (Bunker, Zubek, Vanderslice & Rice, 1992; Gerstel & Gross, 1982, 1984; Govaerts & Dixon, 1988; Harrison & Connors, 1984; Winfield, 1985).

People may want to belong, but most do not seek to make new friends endlessly. Some people want more friends than others, but most people seem to think that having about four to six close relationships is enough (Caldwell & Peplau, 1982; Wheeler & Nezlek, 1977). That is, if you have about five people who care about you, whose company you enjoy, and with whom you can

spend time on regular basis, you probably feel fairly satisfied with your life. (Having at least one of those relationships be a romantic pairing may also be important to most adults). If you have fewer than that, you may be on the lookout for more. Few people seem eager to have more. In one survey (Reis, 1990), the majority of college students rated “having a few close friend” as extremely important, whereas “having lots of casual friends” was relatively unimportant.

The need to belong is called a need, rather than merely a want, because when it is thwarted people suffer more than just being unhappy. Failure to satisfy the need to belong leads to significant health problems, up to and including a higher risk of death. That is, death rates from all kinds of diseases are higher among people without social connections than among those with social connection (Lynch, 1979). Even short of death, people who are alone in the world have more physical and mental health problem than people who belong to a good social network. Loneliness is hard on the body, impairing its natural powers including the immune system and its ability to recover from sickness or injury (Cacioppo & Hawkey, 2005; Kiecolt-Glaser, Ricker, et al., 1984).

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