

Attraction and Rejection (Part 7)

Wan Noraini bt Wan Razab

b) Reasons of spouse similarity (Watson et al., 2004)

Social homogamy refers to “passive, indirect effects on spousal similarity” (Watson et al., 2004, p.1034). The result showed that age and education level are crucial in affecting the mate preference. Because people with similar age study and interact more in the same form of the school, propinquity effect (i.e., the tendency of people to meet and spend time with those who share the common characteristics) plays a significant impact in spousal similarity.

Convergence refers to an increasing similarity with time. Although the previous research showed that there is a greater effect on attitude and value than on personality traits, however, it is found that initial assortment (i.e., similarity within couples at the beginning of marriage), rather than convergence, plays a crucial role in explaining spousal similarity.

Active assortment refers to direct effects on choosing someone similar as self in mating preferences. The data showed that there is a greater effect on political and religious attitudes than on personality traits. A follow-up issue on the reason of the finding was raised. The concepts of idiosyncratic (i.e., different individuals has different mate preferences) and consensual (i.e., a consensus of preference on some prospective mates to others) in mate preference. The data showed that mate preference on political and religious tend to be idiosyncratic, for example, A Catholic prefers to choose the one who is a Catholic, rather than a Buddhist. Such idiosyncratic preference produces high level of active assortment which plays a vital role in affecting spousal similarity.

In summary, active assortment is the most powerful in explaining spousal similarity, whereas convergence has little evidence on showing such effect.

c) Effects of similarity on attraction

Similarity has effects on starting a relationship by initial interpersonal attraction to know each other. It is showed that high attitude similarity resulted in a significant increase in initial attraction to the target person and high attitude dissimilarity resulted in a decrease of initial attraction (Gutkin, Gridley & Wendt, 1976; Kaplan & Olczak, 1971). Besides, similarity also promotes relationship commitment. Study on heterosexual dating couples found that similarity in intrinsic values of the couple was linked to relationship commitment and stability (Kurdek & Schnopp-Wyatt, 1997).

The appeal of similarity was illustrated in an amusing way by a new story (Green, 2005). A man and a woman made contact via the internet and began to exchange emails. They discovered they had a great deal in common, and they became attracted to each other. They “dated” for about six months via email messages, though they did not reveal their names. The woman was also older than she had led the man to believe, so when he asked for her picture, she sent him a photo from a magazine. As their emotions grew stronger, the man pressured the woman to meet him for a romantic rendezvous. She finally relented and agreed to meet him on a beach. he went there, heart pounding and saw woman waiting for him as promised, wearing white shorts and pink tank top. He spoke to her and she turned around, and they both got shock: she was his mother! Obviously, nobody wants to date his own mother (especially because she was still married to his father, who became a laughingstock when the story hit the news and took a very dim view of the whole episode) but family members generally are quite similar to each other and so it is not surprising that when their identities were concealed they had many similarities that produced the attraction.

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