

Attraction and Rejection (Part 8)

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3.2 Complementarity

The model of complementarity explains whether "birds of a feather flock together" or "opposites attract".

Studies show that complementary interaction between two partners increases their attractiveness to each other (Nowicki and Manheim, 1991). Complementary partners preferred closer interpersonal relationship than non-complementary ones (Nowicki & Manheim, 1991). Couples who reported the highest level of loving and harmonious relationship were more dissimilar in dominance than couples who scored lower in relationship quality (Markey & Markey, 2007).

Mathes and Moore (1985) found that people were more attracted to peers approximating to their ideal self than to those who did not. Specifically, low self-esteem individuals appeared more likely to desire a complementary relationship than high self-esteem people. We are attracted to people who complement to us because this allows us to maintain our preferred style of behavior (Markey & Markey (2007), and through interaction with someone who complements our own behavior, we are likely to have a sense of self-validation and security (Carson, 1969).

a) Similarity or Complementarity?

Principles of similarity and complementarity seem to be contradictory on the surface (Posavac, 1971; Klohnen & Mendelsohn, 1998). In fact, they agree on the dimension of warmth. Both principles state that friendly people would prefer friendly partners. (Dryer & Horowitz, 1997)

The importance of similarity and complementarity may depend on the stage of the relationship. Similarity seems to carry considerable weight in initial attraction, while complementarity assumes importance as the relationship develops over time (Vinacke, Shannon,

Palazzo, Balsavage, et-al, 1988). Markey (2007) found that people would be more satisfied with their relationship if their partners differed from them, at least, in terms of dominance, as two dominant persons may experience conflicts while two submissive individuals may have frustration as neither member take the initiative.

Our original question is of the relative importance of similarity and complementarity to liking can be resolved as follows. When two people have similar roles, as in most friendships, the dominant determinant of liking is generally similarity. When two people have different roles, as in the marriage, some friendships and professional relationships in which one is superior to the other, complementarity is important. In these cases, people tend to like others whose behavior fits their role; and since their roles are different, their behaviors tend to be complementary rather than similar. However, even with differing roles, the major determinant of liking in most relationships is similarity on dimensions such as cultural characteristics, socioeconomic class and so on.

Perception and actual behavior might not be congruent with each other. There were cases that dominant people perceived their partners to be similarly dominant, yet in the eyes of independent observers, the actual behavior of their partner was submissive, in other words, complementary to them (Dryer1997). Why do people perceive their romantic partners to be similar to them despite evidence to the contrary? The reason remains unclear, pending further research.

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