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# Attraction and Decision in Choosing a Spouse

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**Abstract**: The choice of ones partner plays an important role on the functionality of the couple, on the degree of cohesion and on the chances of stability. Theoretically, the choice of the conjugal partner in the contemporary space is a free one, not conditioned by families, material transactions or other types of strategies, that exclude the will of the partners. However, a series of cultural elements assimilated by individuals in their social environments consistently mark their influence in this selection process. Today, the most common criterion regarding the selection of the conjugal partner is that related to homogamy, therefore, the free choice must be understood as a composition with different weights, built from cultural assimilations from the community where the conjugal partner became socialized him and which holds subjective elements specific to personal ideals.

However, the contemporary space offers the premise of a rethinking of the homogamic principle, its borders being resized and, at the same time, reassembled in a much freer manner. If once upon a time, spatial and cultural proximity influenced the decisions of choosing a spouse, today, virtual space offers the individual the possibility of constructing criteria with a triple advantage: the possibility of choice, independent of the general norm of the cultural community, the unlimited expansion of proximity, the cancellation or reduction of the reference of the community censorship. Today, individuals no longer reproduce the marital functionality learned in their families of origin. Young people build new relationships that correspond to personal ideals and this type of new attitudes increasingly stimulate relational individualism and, by extension, another type of society, that will reduce to a minimum the old claims of social conformity.

**Keywords:** *interpersonal attraction, choosing a spouse, marital couple.*

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## 1. Interpersonal attraction

Defined as a set of positive attitudes that two people have towards each other (Mitrofan, 2002, p. 13), interpersonal attraction is a complex phenomenon of an emotional nature, that relates to individuals' perception of marital values, psycho-social expectations regarding to married life, personal dreams, etc. The explanatory models of interpersonal attraction are multiple, each with its own set of supporters and detractors.

A first model proposes a cognitivist view on interpersonal attraction. It sums up specific elements of homogamous benchmarks and focuses on the theory of balance. The model is based on Newcomb's attraction theories and Heider's equilibrium theory where "individual A has positive emotions towards object X, and individual B also has positive emotions towards object X". According to this theory, individuals will develop positive emotions towards each other because the emotions towards the object of their attitudes are congruent (Mitrofan, 2002, p. 15; Marinescu, 2011). Heider, through the balance theory, states that people need consistency and balance in their attitudes in order to form lasting social relationships with people who have similar attitudes to them (Fillenbaum, 1968). Such a theory explains the interpersonal attraction that is based on the similarity of individuals and this ia a common sense explanation, because we tend to like those who agree with us and we tend to reject those who attack us and are in discord with our most precious values.

The second model is about reward and states that people who are associated with reward are desirable and therefore we are attracted to them because we associate their presence with positive things, but the reward does not necessarily depend on the fact that in the past there really was a reward, but by the fact that individuals expect rewards in the future (Juravle et al., 2016). Thus, individuals self-program their attraction to a person because it associates the person with future rewards (Mitrofan, 2002, p. 17). According to this model, we tend to like individuals we associate with positive rewards and we tend to reject those we associate with lack of rewards, because the individual needs the feedback of the actions he takes, in order to be able to contextualize the situations in which he finds himself (Winch, 1955).

The reward can be achieved through support, through the fact that they pay attention to us, through personality traits valued by the source of attraction, such as beauty, intelligence or humor, through rewards related to money, status, access to information, etc.. At the same time, we can be attracted to a person because we associate their presence with pleasant

experiences, even if the target of attraction is not directly involved in the experiences lived by the one who feels the attraction.

These two models can be explained by the phenomenon of affect reinforcement, which explains the way in which positive affects in the presence of a person strengthen the attraction towards them, while negative affects weaken it, but primarily individuals are attracted to those who have attitudes consistent with their own our attitudes (Bryne, 1971; Turliuc, 2004). Thus, it is possible to discuss interpersonal attraction from the perspective of the value attributed to the attitudes and even from the perspective of the costs and benefits the partners caught in this type of interaction might face.

A final model concerns equity and the calculation of the costs and benefits of the partners. Thus, each individual in a dyad receives certain rewards that establish satisfaction in a relationship, and this satisfaction is the result of the benefits and costs that the partners experience. What is important to note is that the reactions are stable and satisfactory when the partners' perception of the contributions to the relationship are equal, therefore, the perception of their costs and profits, as well as those of the partner, categorically influence the stability of a relationship and the attraction. Therefore, awareness on the transformation of interest, from personal reward, to fair reward, for dyad members stabilizes the relationship, while "accounting" destabilizes it (Mitrofan, 2002, p. 22).

In conclusion, it can be said that these models try to explain interpersonal attraction by focusing especially on attitudes and their economy, which leads to rigid explanations of this phenomenon that is so complex and difficult to analyze from a scientific point of view, but this rigidity is necessary to be able to get out of the danger of idealizing interpersonal attraction.

From a psychological point of view, attraction is a "set of affective states, through strong emotions and feelings that motivate and engage the individual in the continuation of the relationship" (Turliuc, 2004), being substantiated by three pillars: the cognitive, affective and behavioral components.

The cognitive component focuses on the perception of the competence of the target, the assessment of the degree of similarity between the source and the target of the attraction and the evaluation of the target's ability to reward the source of the attraction. The affective component is shaped around the values given by the source to the qualities of the target and the pleasure caused by the received rewards, and the behavioral component refers to the behavior of the source towards the target person

and to the voluntary and involuntary reactions that the source shows in relation to the target of the attraction (Turliuc, 2004).

So, it can be said that attractiveness is not only limited to the affective component. Before you feel that you are attracted to an individual, you evaluate their behavior, in order to confirm or deny whether later affective connections will be formed, and after the formation of these connections you will make the decision to act or not to act, in order to form a relationship that would lay the foundations for the new couple (Barbu 2016a; 2016b). However, there are also biological theories that state that interpersonal attraction is a chemical process based on the genetic compatibility of the two partners, in order to conceive an offspring with the highest chances of survival (Mitrofan, 2002). However, following the path of psychosociology, we must note that interpersonal attraction (Florea et al., 2020) depends on behavioral assessment, the balance of costs and benefits, and at the same time on attitudinal compatibility, and in the event that there are imbalances on these pillars, marital stability risks being attacked.

On another note, the difference between interpersonal attraction and love must be drawn (Huidu, 2019). How can we define love? It can be said that "love is one's ability to emotionally conquer another, in the strongest sense, to penetrate the more or less stable world of their habits, feelings, opinions and behaviors. It is a fundamental way of meeting, merging and transgressing the psychology of the two sexes, a simultaneous sexual, psychological and spiritual communication" (Chelcea & Ivan, 2008, p. 248).

So, the essential characteristic of love can be reduced to the sharing of positive feelings and the existing connection between the two partners, but at the same time there are different ways of loving and defining love, depending on the elements that form the love triangle. According to researcher Robert Sterberg (1986), love can be explained by: intimacy, passion and involvement/commitment. Thus, these elements form different types of love.

There is love based on only one element. Thus, attraction/pleasure is based on intimacy, crazy love is based on passion and loyal love relies on commitment. Love based on two elements is also thought of in three dimensions: romantic love is based on intimacy and passion, illusory love is based on commitment and passion, and comradely love is based on commitment and intimacy.

Finally, by the absence of all three elements we can say that we are dealing with a lack of love or by the presence of all three elements we can say that we have met full love (Chelcea & Ivan, 2008, pp. 248-250). So, romantic love is different from other types of love by its passionate

character, Liebowitz (1983) claiming that the passion characteristic of romantic love is given by emotional, behavioral and chemical elements, being characterized by dual feelings such as joy-suffering, anxiety-relief, altruism-egoism.

## 2. The decision to choose a spouse

Individuals choose their life partner by virtue of reasons related to both geographical space and behavioral, attitudinal and physiognomy characteristics. Thus, the main determinants of interpersonal attraction, as well as the factors that help to choose a partner are: similarity, complementarity, geographical proximity and physical attraction, and after these elements are checked and accepted (filtered), individuals resort to different ways of "encouraging", through which they attract attention, in order to establish a relationship.

The choice of partner in modern society has become, according to Jean Claude Kauffman, a science through which the individual develops a behavioral type called "homo scientificus", and their choice is a process based on trial and error (Kauffman, 1990, p. 18). However, there are certain stages that the individual goes through in the decision-making process. The first stage is that of the stimuli and which is centered on the idea of a primary interpersonal attraction, which is the idea of first impression and physical attractiveness. This stage is very important in the further evolution of the relationship, the emphasis physical attraction, proximity, similarity and complementarity, through which individuals evaluate themselves positively.

After the first stage has been overcome, individuals enter the values stage. In this stage, the individuals get to know themselves, but also each other, in order to establish the compatibility of values and outline the future marital relationship. In other words, the individual who find themselves in this stage outlines their marital role expectations, as well as observes if there is a similarity of cultural norms and values. After this stage, we move to the stage of partnership roles, when individuals test their compatibility in order to adopt the desirable roles, both by themselves and by their partners (Mitrofan, 2002, pp. 150-151). At the same time, the choice of partner is explained by Tennov referring to two stages, the first is that of admiration for a certain person and the second refers to sexual attraction (Turliuc, 2004).

Therefore, choosing a partner is not something without rationality, even if this process is not fully aware, the individual goes through several stages and filters the information in order to make the best decision. Thus,

when we have found our soul mate, we explain this through the prism of love and the feeling of falling in love, but in order to fall in love partners go through a series of evaluations, through various filters and tests that qualify them or not for creating a couple. So, the criteria on which the decision is based are:

**1. Similarity** – Similar traits between individuals make them like each other because they are found in others, which is somewhat intuitive because it is normal to tend to like those who are similar to us. According to the principle of equilibrium theory, it is more likely that those like us have the same values or give the same importance to values with which we agree. Thus, interpersonal attraction born from similarity can be explained by appealing to the adaptive evolution of the human species (Iluț, 2005, pp. 113-115). The research undertaken by Donn Bryne (Bryne, 1971; Bryne et al., 1986) links the similarity of attitudes to interpersonal attraction, and from the results of his experiments, it emerged that individuals are attracted to a person whose attitude is consistent with their own attitudes. It is important to note that similarity does not necessarily lead to attraction and the choice of a partner, but facilitates them, because the characteristics of the target person are also important.

**2. Complementarity** – The different, complementary traits of the co-participants in the relationship are the things that cause them to be influenced in the decision-making process that involves choosing a partner. The complementarity theory of needs developed by Bryne (1971) explains the way in which individuals are attracted to each other by virtue of complementary needs and their fulfillment. Therefore, the complementarity of needs and behavior is another "ingredient" that leads to the stability of interpersonal relationships, being a main criterion for choosing a conjugal partner (Mitrofan, 2002; Turliuc, 2004). The criterion of complementarity is based on a form of mutual fulfillment of needs, each relying on the specific qualities of the other for the optimal fulfillment of their own desires, expectations, needs, etc.

**3. Geographical/physical proximity** – This criterion for choosing a partner is an important one, but in the era of Internet dominance, geographical proximity no longer plays such an important role in choosing a partner, as in the mutual need of individuals to interact physically. The difference between online and face-to-face communication substantially influences the type of interaction, the level of solidarity, romantic fusion and emotional involvement. Thus, proximity is a way in which individuals get to know each other, explore their wants and needs, and fulfill them. But according to theorists, the variable of physical proximity refers to the fact

that you are more likely to develop positive feelings towards a person who is in the same geographical area. Festinger, Schachter and Beck, through the study carried out in 1950, came to the conclusion that the geographically closest individuals tend to develop closer social relations compared to those who are in a more distant geographical space (Mitrofan, 2002, p. 38; Turliuc , 2004). At the same time, physical proximity can be an explanation for the fact that we tend to behave more nicely with people we meet every day, compared to people we rarely meet. This was explained by Newcomb through the incentive-reward/punishment theory which states that individuals resort to desirable behaviors towards those they interact with, in order to get rewarded and avoid punishments (Chelcea, 2008, pp. 254-257; Mitrofan, 2002, p. 40). Therefore, physical proximity (Damian et al., 2019; Damian et al., 2021) helps to create connections and strengthens interpersonal attraction, and it is a good criterion for choosing a partner because the opportunities for interaction are higher and, therefore, better stimulate the mutual knowledge of the social actors, by facilitating the frequency of interactions and by repeated exposure to certain stimuli.

**4. Physical attractiveness -** Although it is difficult for us to admit this in order not to be labeled as shallow, Hartfield and Sprecher (1986) found that individuals, regardless of gender, choose their partner based on physical attractiveness. This would translate into facial and body symmetry, healthy appearance and reference to the culturally promoted standard of beauty. At the same time, Buss (2008) observed that there is, however, a difference between women and men, and this would be based on the fact that beautiful women expect not only physical beauty from potential partners, but also other characteristics, either material or intellectual. Thus, physical attractiveness plays a very important role in choosing a partner, and individuals tend to have their partners be similar in terms of attractiveness, which can be explained by the cost-benefit analysis that individuals unconsciously apply (Terec - Vlad, 2015). This analysis of costs and benefits is a way in which people want to eliminate the risk of being rejected and maximize the possibility of being accepted (Iluț, 2005, pp. 113-115), (Chelcea, 2008, pp. 257- 260). Physical attractiveness does not only involve sexual stimulation, because there are studies, such as that of Forgas (1987), or Clifford and Walster (1973), that show that beautiful people are seen as more intelligent and happier, because they are awarded socially desirable personality traits through the halo effect. Thus, it can be said that physical attractiveness somewhat distorts the examination of an individual's behavior or performance, simply because beauty is an important social value. Therefore, physical attractiveness or physical beauty is one criterion to base

the partner selection process on, because the halo effect teaches us that we attribute intelligence and greater chances of success to beautiful people.

**5. Compatibility** is defined as the mutual agreement on the characteristics of each individual, in order to achieve the conjugal unit. In other words, compatibility refers to the folding and complementarity of all needs, to their overlap and to the realization of a unitary whole, in which both sexual and emotional needs are at the same time similar and complementary (Mitrofan, 2002, p.156). Therefore, the degree of compatibility between partners helps them to create an environment where the benefits are mutual, which would lead to marital success and the stability of the couple.

**6. Filters** – Partner hunting is also a process of filtering obtained information, based on the observations of potential partners. Davis and Kerckhoff (1962) demonstrated that the choice of a partner is made on several levels, that are eliminated one by one in order to adopt the best decision with the best result. Thus, they identified several filters through which individuals pass information: proximity or similarity-complementarity.

## 3. Conclusions

There is no single theory to demonstrate attraction or mate choice decision. If in the traditional space and, less so, in the modern space, the models for choosing a conjugal partner had a fixed or relatively fixed structure, contemporaneity opens the premise of any form of conjugal choice and fusion. Today, not all relationships propose long-term stability, commitment, involvement, etc. New concepts such as internet relationships, relationships with benefits (mostly only erotic) used to appear, as serious social sins that would block or consistently influence future marriages.

Contemporary space today offers a generous offer to be in a couple and society no longer has the power to cultivate and impose its imperatives or control resources. Obviously, the orientation of young people is no longer aimed at the behaviors of the old benchmarks of solidarity, but more particularly at those of relational individualism. The individual first validates himself in any marital context, in order to only then credit the relationship. Each sees in the other the resource of individual fulfillment and the effect of the two fulfillments creates the premise of joint fulfillment. Thus, if once upon a time, solidarity was the basic premise of conjugal fusion, being perceived as a function of the family, today it becomes only the effect of conjugal functionality.

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