

**When Similarity Backfires: Similar same-sex  
others become less attractive in a mating context**

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## ***Preference for Similarity***

***Birds of a feather flock together***

People select mates and friends who are similar to them on a variety of dimensions (Buss, 1985; Kandel, Davies, & Baydar, 1990).

## ***Preference for Similarity***

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People select mates and friends who are similar to them on a variety of dimensions (Buss, 1985; Kandel, Davies, & Baydar, 1990).

Including... attitudes (Byrne & Nelson, 1964), values (Sprecher, 1998), beliefs (Morry, 2003), personality (Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000), physical characteristics (Crandall, Schiffhauer, & Harvey, 1997), and even the first letter of one's name (Jones, Pelham, Carvallo, & Mirenberg, 2004).

## ***Friendship & Similarity***

***Homophily effect***

***Dunbar (2018)***

**Friendships** have been shown to be homophilous for ethnicity, age, religion, education, and social values, place of origin, educational history, hobbies, interests, musical tastes, sense of humour, and worldviews.

***But friends can also be competitors...  
: Intrasexual Competition***

Bleske & Buss (1998)

When asked to list disadvantages of their close same-sex friendships, a small proportion of college-aged men and women reported that they and their close friends had been **attracted to the same member of the opposite sex.**

Bleske & Buss (2000)

Further, 10% of men and 20% of women reported **competing frequently with their friends** to attract members of the opposite sex.

# *Intrasexual Competition*

## *Stand Out from the Crowd*

The New York Times

## Facebook Helps Reduce Prom-Dress Angst



By [Marisa Meltzer](#)

April 12, 2013

Just before this year's Oscars ceremony, Anne Hathaway ditched a Valentino gown for Prada when she found out that her co-star Amanda Seyfried was set to wear a similar dress.

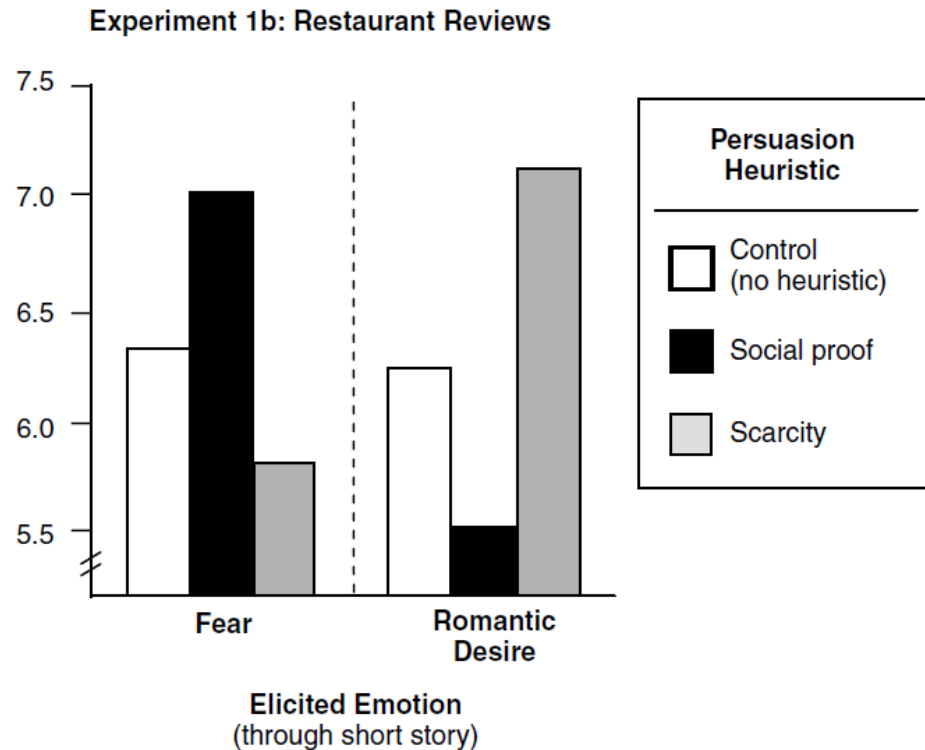
It turns out prom-bound high school girls have created a neat solution for such problems in the form of Facebook groups with names like Don't Steal My Prom Dress.

Therein, girls post photos of the dresses they intend to wear (the indecisive occasionally post multiple gowns) as a way of laying claim to the style and making sure they don't show up as someone's unintentional twin.

(Meltzer, 2013)

# *Intrasexual Competition*

## *Stand Out from the Crowd*



Griskevicius et al., (2009)

A core strategy evolutionarily associated with successful mate attraction is **salient positive differentiation**.

When various species of animals are approached by the opposite sex, they often engage in conspicuous displays that function both to **attract the attention of the opposite sex** and to **positively differentiate the individual from same-sex rivals** (Miller 2000; Griskevicius et al., 2007).

## *Intrasexual Competition*

- Being close to a same-sex person with similarity can be a potential threat

Positive assortment may lead to competition between friends for attention from members of the opposite sex – in particular, for attention from a friend's mate (Bleske & Shackelford, 2001).



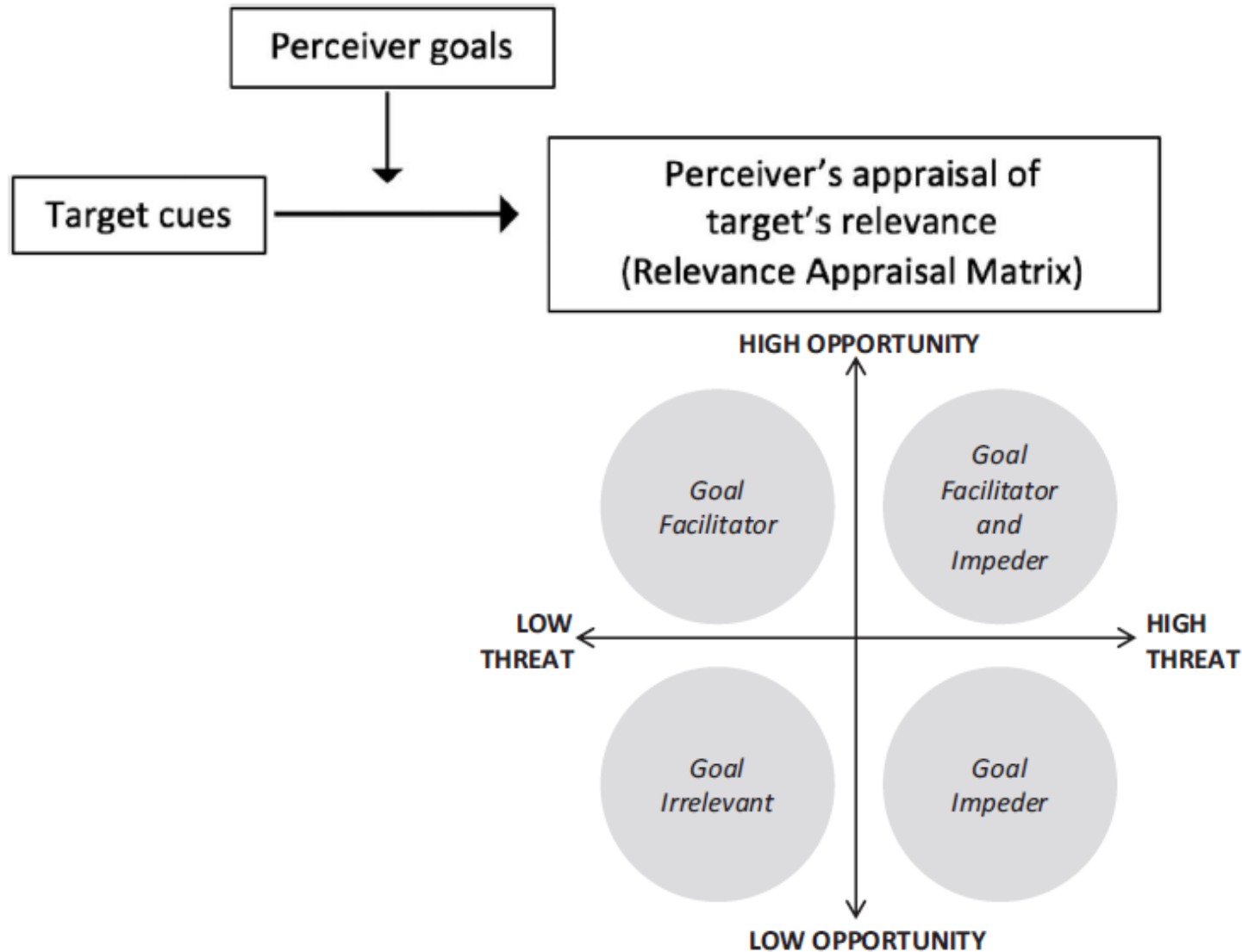
## ***“Simality in same-sex others”***

***Cue to potential friendship but also a threat....***

***Especially in dimensions intertwined with mating signals.***

behaviors, physical characteristics, sense of humour, fashion style, personal merits.

# ***Affordance Management Theory***



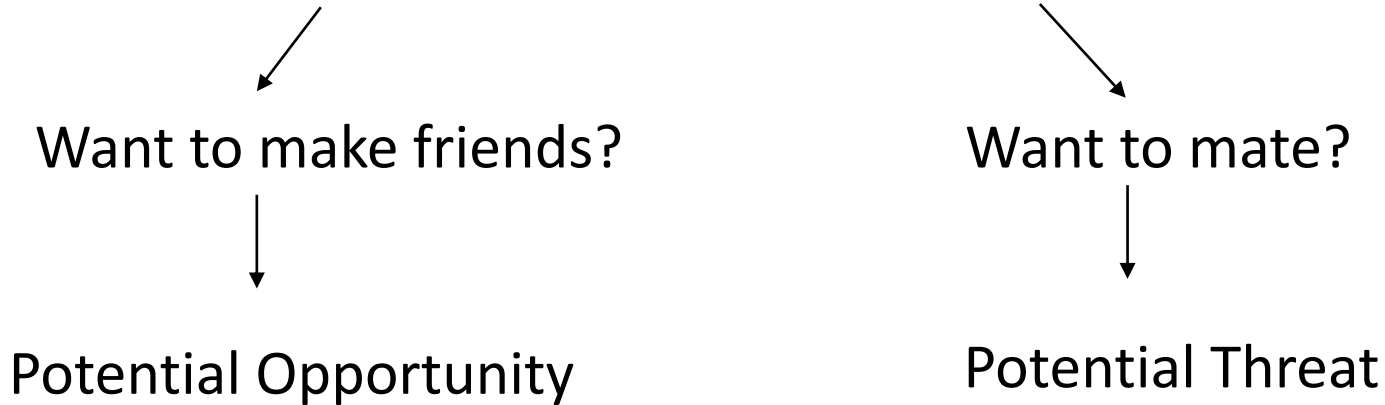
Relevance Appraisal Matrix (Neel & Lassetter, 2019)

# Affordance Management Theory

Table 1  
*Examples of Targets From the Four Quadrants of the Relevance Appraisal Matrix (Facilitator, Impeder, Facilitator/Impeder, and Irrelevant) Across Four Goals (Self-Protection, Mate-Seeking, Disease Avoidance, and Affiliation)*

Goal/Motive	Category of social affordance			
	Facilitator	Impeder	Facilitator/Impeder	Irrelevant
Self-protection from physical danger	Physically formidable ally; self-defense class instructor	Dangerous, strong, angry person; naïve ally who might put you in danger	Strong outgroup male who shows signs of being an ally	Weak person from conflict-irrelevant group
Mate-seeking	Desirable romantic partners; friends who might set up initial meetings with prospective dates	Competitors who seek to date desirable people	Friends who help facilitate meeting partners but may also be competitors	People not considered desirable potential mates who also won't obstruct mate seeking
Disease-avoidance	Doctors/medical professionals	Sick people within close proximity; people with poor hygiene	Sick doctor/medical professional	People outside of close proximity
Affiliation	Someone who will introduce you to others; a well-connected friend	A social enemy; someone who might exclude you	“Frenemy” – someone who might connect you with others but might also exclude you or aim to damage your reputation	Those deemed poor prospects for friendship who also do not obstruct finding other friends

## ***Perceptions of Similarity in Same-sex others***



### ***Hypothesis***

- 1. In Affiliation Context, people would prefer same-sex others who possess similarity (vs. non-similarity)*
- 2. In Mating Context, people would not prefer same-sex others who possess similarity (vs. non-similarity)*

## [STUDY 1]

*People would not prefer same-sex others with similar dressing style  
in mating context*  
**(vs. affiliation context)**



## Appearance?

**Friends** are homophilous for even fashion style and looks (Lin et al., 2015)

But, also a mating signal.

- Wearing stylish clothes, jewelry, makeup, and keeping hair groomed are prevalent mating tactics (Buss, 1998)
- Women consume conspicuous products that promotes their appearance (Wang & Griskevicius, 2016; Hudders et al., 2014).

**In Mating context**, people should positively **differentiate** oneself from same-sex rivals especially in aspects of appearance.

## [STUDY 1]

### *Procedure*

#### *Independent Variable:*

Motivational context (Between: Mate Seeking/ Affiliation Context)

Similarity cue in clothing style (Within: Similarity / Without Similarity)

Gender (Male /Female) - *Exploratory*

#### *Dependent Variable:*

Liking

Emotion: Happy/Pleased (1-7), Frustrated/Annoyed (1-7)

## [STUDY 1]

### *Procedure*

Participants:

110 participants ( $M_{age} = 39.70$ ,  $SD_{age} = 12.66$ ; 50 female) from TurkPrime.

Power:

We determined 76 participants were required for .80 power to detect an interaction of small effect size ( $f = .20$ ) assuming measurement correlation



## [STUDY 1]

### ***Vignette***

This evening, the crew-leader invited the members for a home-party. You are very excited because you really want to get close to **(a same-sex friend /your crush)**. After preparing for the party, you arrive at the party. Unexpectedly, you find out two **(participants' sex; named Anne and Emma/Luke and Jack)**, new members of the Running crew. Knowing nothing about them, you take a closer look and find out you share some similarity in appearance and fashion style with (Anne/Luke) but not with (Emma/Jack).

## [STUDY 1]

### Liking

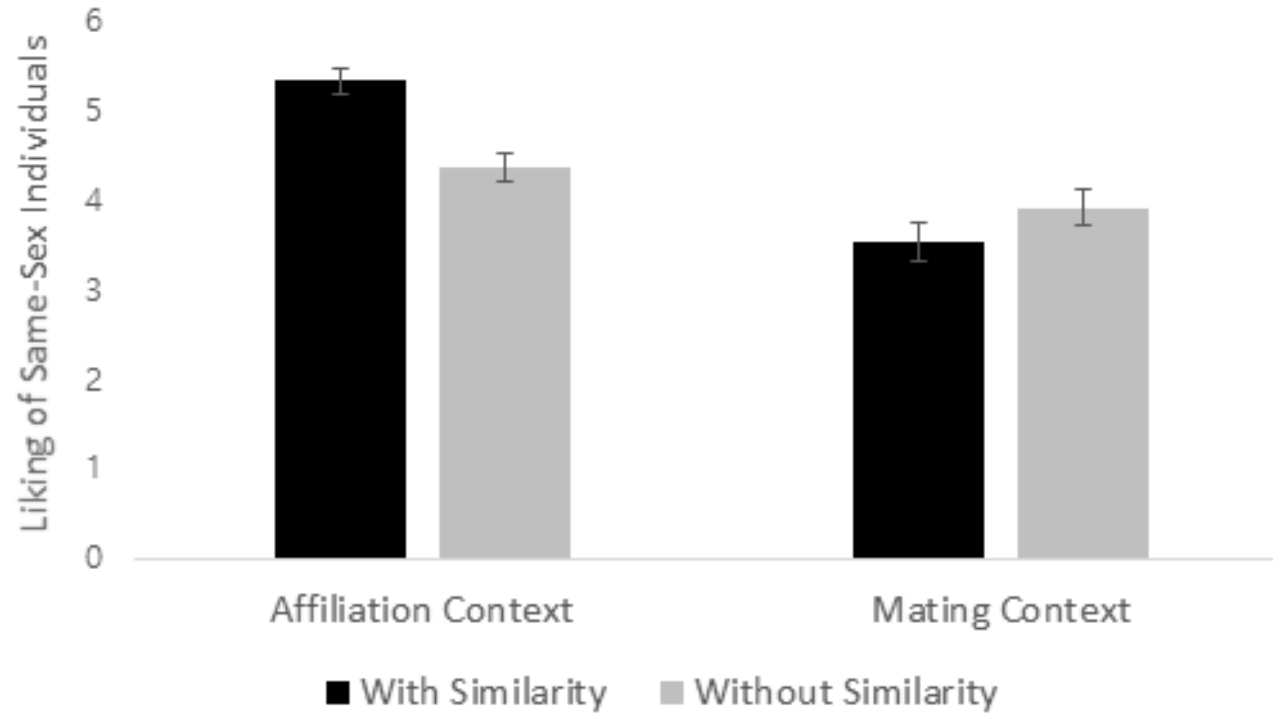
Four questions assessed participants' liking and attitudes toward the same-sex individual with or without similarity ( $\alpha = .96$ ; e.g., "Do you think you would like her/him?", "Do you feel positive about her/him?") on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much).

### Anticipated Emotions

Additionally, they rated how they would feel if they sat right next to the target with or without similarity. Positive emotion was rated by how pleased and happy ( $\alpha = 0.96$ ) and negative emotion was rated by how frustrated and annoyed on a 7-point scale ( $\alpha = 0.95$ ; not at all, 7 = very much).

## [STUDY 1] Results

### *Liking:*



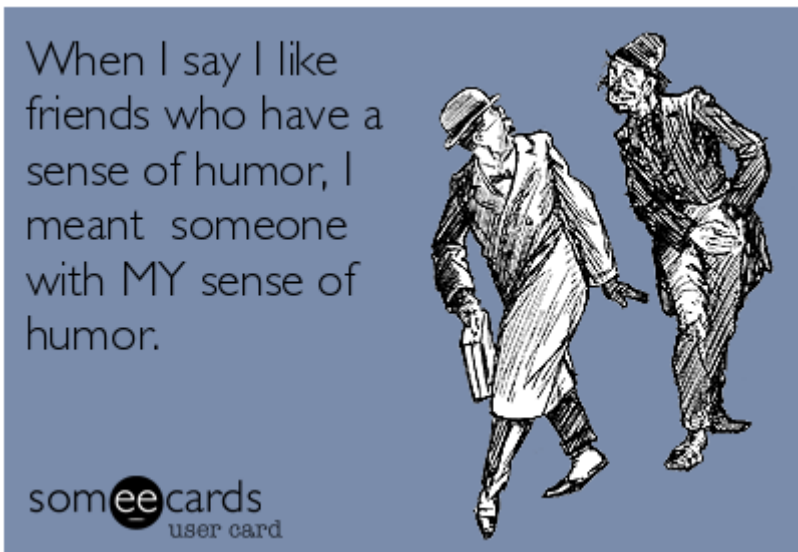
[STUDY 1] Results

Anticipated Emotions:

<i>Measures</i>	Affiliation Context				Mating Context			
	Similarity		Without Similarity		Similarity		Without Similarity	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Positive Emotion	5.37	1.28	4.37	1.33	3.38	1.58	3.98	1.36
Negative Emotion	1.66	1.34	2.41	1.51	3.64	1.77	3.14	1.75
Aggregated	3.71	1.88	1.96	2.22	-0.25	2.86	0.837	2.46

## [STUDY 2]

*People would not prefer others with the same sense of humor  
in mating context*



## Humor?

**Friends** are homophilous for humor style (Dunbar, 2017)

But, also a mating signal (Greengross & Miller, 2011)

- People value humor production ability in mates (Lundy, Tan, & Cunningham, 1998; Bressler et al., 2006)
- Females laugh more in response to humor produced by the opposite sex (Provine, 2000)
- People value mates who share their humor style (Bressler et al., 2006).

## [STUDY 2]

### *Procedure*

#### ***Independent Variable:***

Motivation (Between: Mate Seeking/ Affiliation Context)

Similarity cue in humor (Within: Similarity / Without Similarity)

Gender (Male /Female) - *Exploratory*

#### ***Dependent Variable:***

Liking

Emotion: Happy/Pleased (1-7), Frustrated/Annoyed (1-7)

## [STUDY 2]

### *Procedure*

Participants:

99 participants ( $M_{age} = 39.70$ ,  $SD_{age} = 12.66$ ; 50 female) from TurkPrime.

Power:

We determined 76 participants were required for .80 power to detect an interaction of small effect size ( $f = .20$ ) assuming measurement correlation



## [STUDY 2]

.....You've been excited about Travelers' club for a while because you love trips. What makes it better is that you feel like you might make **(same-sex best friend/a romantic partner)** who shares your thoughts. This evening, you got invited to a dinner party from the club leader. At the party, you unexpectedly see two **(participant's sex; named Rachel and Claire/Josh and David)**, who happens to be new members of the club. You know nothing about them yet, so everyone circles around for a talk. Everyone took turns talking about their life and travel stories." While talking with two new members, participants find out that especially one member shares similar humor style, because someone turns and say, "Hey, Rachel/Josh's stories and jokes are **really similar** to yours

## [STUDY 2]

### Liking

Four questions assessed participants' liking and attitudes toward the same-sex individual with or without similarity ( $\alpha = .96$ ; e.g., "Do you think you would like her/him?", "Do you feel positive about her/him?") on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much).

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## [STUDY 2] Results

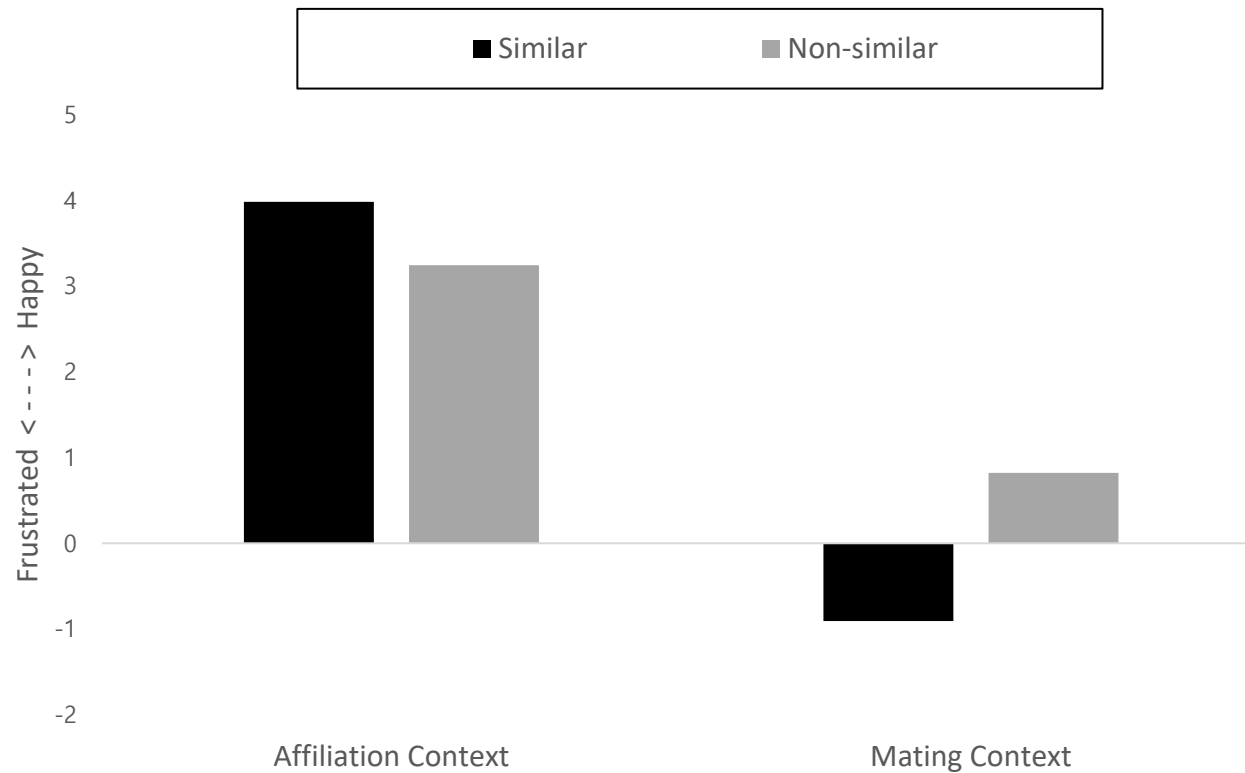
### *DV: Liking*

Significant two-way interaction,  $F(1, 108) = 14.43, p < .001., \eta^2_p = .13.$

In **affiliation context**, participants *preferred same-sex targets with similar style* ( $M = 5.70, SD = .87$ ) compared to targets without similar style ( $M = 4.71, SD = 1.18$ ),  $t(46) = 5.81, p < .001, d = 0.85$ . Interestingly, this relationship did not hold in **mate-seeking context**. In this context, participants *did not prefer* the same-sex targets with similarity ( $M = 3.86, SD = 1.28$ ) compared to targets without similar styles ( $M = 3.94, SD = 1.66$ ),  $t(51) = .46, p = .65$ .

## [STUDY 2] Results

***DV: Anticipated Emotions***



## [STUDY 3]

### Personal tastes & merits

- To clarify interpretation, mate-seeking context was compared against a baseline condition (instead of the previously used friend-seeking context).
- Conceptual expansion: inclusion of a potential moderating variable (trait Agreeableness).
  - Past research has demonstrated that individuals with *high levels of agreeableness* generally prefer cooperation to competition and seek harmonious relationships with others; while those *low in agreeableness* show more willingness to engage in competition and assert their self interest in interpersonal conflicts (Caprara et al., 2010; Graziano et al., 2007; Roccas et al., 2002; Matz & Gladstone, 2020).
  - As such, less agreeable individuals might display a particularly strong dislike towards similar others if they appear as intrasexual competitors.

## [STUDY 3] *Methods*

### *Independent Variable:*

Motivational Context (Between: Mate Seeking/ Affiliation Context)

Similarity cue in personal merits (Within: Similar/Disimilar)

Agreeableness (e.g., "Likes to cooperate with others", "Has a forgiving nature")

### *Dependent Variable:*

General Liking

Emotion: Happy/Pleased (1-7), Frustrated/Annoyed (1-7)

## **[STUDY 3] *Methods***

### **Personal tastes & strengths**

- Participants first filled in a questionnaire on personality traits and further answered several open-ended questions about their self-perceived merits and characteristics.
- In the next section, participants completed a questionnaire about a hypothetical campus event where university students would have a chance to meet new students. They were told that the event would allow them to interact with other similar (who have characters matching with ones they just wrote) or dissimilar students.

[STUDY 3] *Results*

Personal tastes & strengths

*General liking:*

	Male				Female			
	Similar		Non-similar		Similar		Non-similar targets	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Study3</i>								
Baseline	4.85	1.23	4.12	0.64	5.50	1.23	4.40	1.10
Mate-seeking context	4.11	1.39	4.14	1.17	4.43	1.42	4.25	1.03



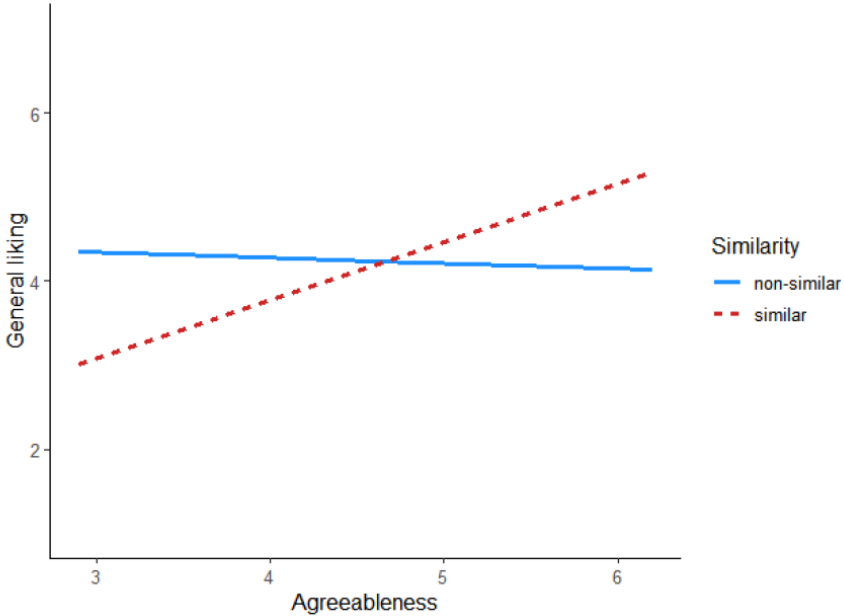
# [STUDY 3] *Results*

## Personal tastes & merits

### *Anticipated level of emotions:*

<i>Measures</i>	Control Condition				Mating-seeking Condition			
	Similar		Non-similar		Similar		Non-similar	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Study3</i>								
Positive Emotions	5.09	1.26	3.82	1.1	4.06	1.33	3.72	1.01
Negative Emotions	2.29	1.26	2.45	1.25	3.57	1.52	2.75	1.26
Aggregated	2.79	2.24	1.37	1.69	0.481	2.61	0.969	1.73

### *Moderation effect of agreeableness:*



# Implications

- How motivation shape interpersonal perception
  - Similarity can be considered frustrating in specific situations
  - Supports the Affordance Management Approach in interpersonal perception.
  - Similarity Preference leading to various prosocial outcomes. But not always..?
- Intrasexual competition
  - Competition appears to occupy women as much as men: no sex difference observed in overall performance frequency of sexual tactics (Buss, 1998).
  - Mostly concentrated on female's appearance and male's status and power

## Limitation & Future Directions

- Scenario-methods cannot speak to the impact in real-life settings.
  - Limited subset of information about the same-sex targets' characteristics
  - Difference between observable (vs. less observable) characteristics
- No sex difference observed in overall performance frequency of sexual tactics (Buss, 1998).
  - Women might be more frequently vigilant towards intrasexual competitors that threaten their unique looks than men.
  - Men might take direct actions while women might take indirect actions against the similar target.
- Cultural differences.

THANK YOU