

Chameleon Effect ^[1]

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And the Chartrand & Bargh Experiments

Also called unintentional mirroring, the chameleon effect usually applies to people who are getting along so well, each tend to mimic each other's body posture, hand gestures, speaking accents, among others. This was confirmed by the Chartrand and Bargh experiments.

The perfect description of the chameleon effect is the cliché saying:

"Imitation is the best form of flattery."

In interpersonal relations, often times mimicking another's body language can increase our likeability. This phenomenon is what Chartrand and John Bargh calls the Chameleon Effect.

According to Chartrand and Bargh, the chameleon effect is the natural tendency to imitate another person's speech inflections and physical expressions. You can notice that people who get along well behave almost the same way, as they unintentionally mimic each other's body posture, hand gestures, speaking accents, and other. The body is actually autonomously making the interaction smoother and increasing the level of likeability when in rapport.

Statement of the Problem

In 1999, two professors of Psychology at New York University conducted experiments that will study the phenomenon of the chameleon effect. Their inquiry wanted to address the questions of whether people automatically copy each other regardless if they are strangers, if doing such increases their likeability and whether people who are more agreeable or more open to other's opinions display the chameleon phenomenon more.

Methodology

In Chartrand and Bargh's first experiment, 78 individuals were asked to have a one-on-one talk with one of the experimenters. Each of the experimenters employed varying mannerisms where one would smile or touch their faces more than the other and other did more foot wagging than the others.

To find out whether wagging foot and touching the face has any direct effect on the interaction between the experimenter and the participants, the individuals were asked to participate in the second experiment. Here, the subjects were again sent to a room to have a conversation with an experimenter about a photograph. With half the subjects, the experimenters maintained a neutral and relaxed seated position. But others, the experimenters mimicked the posture, movements and mannerisms of other subjects, crossing their legs or twirling their hair when subjects did. Afterwards, participants were asked to rate how much they liked the experimenter and the smoothness of the interaction on a scaled of 1 to 9.

In the third experiment, the researchers wanted to find out what kind of psychological dispositions affect a person's tendency of naturally engaging in mimicry more than others do. The researchers then looked at perspective-taking, which is the degree, to which people naturally take others' perspectives.

In the third experiment, 55 subjects [3] were asked to fill out a perspective-taking questionnaire, along with a measure of empathy. They were made to sit opposite the experimenter, who was also tasked to do the same mannerisms like face rubbing and foot wagging as before.

Results

In the first study, the subjects noticeably copied the experimenter who was actually stranger to them, as measured by face touching, foot wagging and smiling. The act of face touching increased by 20% but the rate of foot wagging increased by a significant figure of 50% when participants were inspired by another foot wagger.

On the second experiment, the students whose moves had been imitated had rated their experimenters as more likable, and reported having better and smoother interactions with them. Apparently, mirroring did indeed work to increase the experimenter's likeability. In qualitative terms, the experimenter's likeability was rated at 6.62 and smoothness was rated at 6.76, when their gestures were copied. On the contrary, when the experimenters were not mimicked, they were rated for likeability at an average of 5.91 and smoothness for an average of 6.02, slightly less compared to when they were mimicked.

On the third experiment, Chartrand and Bargh found out that individuals who were more open to other people's ideas mimicked face rubbing gestures more by 30% and foot wagging by 50% compared to their counterparts. Furthermore, it's been discovered that people's empathic characteristic do not affect their rate of mimicry at all, or their likeliness to display the chameleon effect. This offers the conclusion that perspective taking is more cognitive rather than emotional.

Conclusion

In conclusion, people feel a rapport with those who naturally mimic their moves.

Unintentional mimicry and imitation functions as a social cohesive. The chameleon effect actually becomes a warm response that facilitates social interactions. Individuals usually do it

almost instantly that they are not aware of it, and in most occasions, doing such really does increase their likeability. Emphatic people, or those who easily takes the perspective of others, were also concluded to be mirroring other people's actions more often. "Those who pay more attention mimic more," says Chartrand, and make more friends in the process.

Sources

The Chameleon Effect [4]

We're All Copycats [5]

Unintentional Mirroring: The Chameleon Effect [6]

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[4] <http://www.spring.org.uk/2009/11/the-chameleon-effect.php>

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