Similarity versus liking: A clarification¹

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It had been found in previous research that both attitude similarity and personal evaluations affect attraction. Aronson and Worchel repeated one of these experiments utilizing a face-to-face situation and found Ss responsive only to personal evaluations, not to attitude similarity. Their failure was attributable to their use of a restricted range of attitude similarity-dissimilarity. Replicating their study with greater attitudinal differentiation, the present investigation indicated that even with face-to-face interaction, personal evaluation and attitude similarity each affect attraction. With weighting coefficients derived in a noninteractive situation, attraction in the face-to-face situation was again found to be a linear function of weighted positive reinforcements.

In a recent article, Aronson & Worchel (1966) proposed that the consistently demonstrated effect of attitude similarity on interpersonal attraction is based on the S's implicit assumption that someone who shares his attitudes would like him. Even though previous research (Byrne & Rhamey, 1965) has shown that both attitude similarity and personal evaluations affect attraction, Aronson and Worchel dismissed that finding as an artifact of the noninteractive experimental design. They predicted that "...after a face-to-face interaction, if O likes P, P will like O; the similarity or dissimilarity of O's attitudes to P's attitudes will have a negligible effect" (p. 157).

Their procedure involved the interaction of a S with a stooge who expressed either similar or dissimilar attitudes followed by an exchange of messages in which the stooge indicated either liking or disliking for the S. Then, attraction toward the stooge was ascertained. They reported a significant main effect due to liking with no other significant effects.

That study would have been of some value as an exploration of the generality of the attraction paradigm had it repeated the Byrne and Rhamey experiment with one difference—a face-to-face interaction. Unfortunately, Aronson and Worchel chose to alter the attitude variable as well. They used only a seven-item attitude scale, and either two or five similar items constituted the attitude dimension; Byrne and Rhamey used a 12-item scale with similarity ranging from .00 to 1.00. Thus, in a new stimulus context, they set out to prove the null hypothesis while employing a highly restricted range of the attitude similarity variable. They found a significant effect for like-dislike, but not for similarity-dissimilarity. Though the relevant F ratio for similarity was not reported, they note "a slight tendency for the similar O to be better liked than the dissimilar O." Reanalysis of their data indicates an

F of 3.66 which is significant at the .06 level with 1/36 degrees of freedom.

Rather than leave any degree of ambiguity, however, it was decided to replicate the Aronson-Worchel design with a slightly more extended range of attitude similarity-dissimilarity.

Method

The Ss were 30 male undergraduates. The procedure followed that described by the other authors. The S and a stooge each filled out a seven-item attitude scale, and then read their responses aloud with the S responding first each time. By a prearranged schedule, the stooge either expressed similar views (one-point discrepancy) on all items or dissimilar views (three-point discrepancy) on all items. The S and the stooge then were asked to write a few sentences regarding their reaction to the experiment; these messages were then exchanged, and the S received one of the Aronson-Worchel communications in which like or dislike was expressed. Finally, the S and the stooge were asked to evaluate each other on the Interpersonal Judgment Scale, the last two items of which are summed to yield the measure of attraction. The Ss were then informed of the purpose of the experiment.

Results

The means of the attraction responses are shown in Table 1. Analysis of variance indicated that both the like-dislike variable ($F=63.28$, $df=1/26$, $p<.001$) and the similarity-dissimilarity variable ($F=12.74$, $df=1/26$, $p<.001$) yielded highly significant effects. The F ratio for the interaction was less than one.

Discussion

It would seem, then, that the results of all three investigations are quite consistent in showing (1) the powerful effect of interpersonal evaluations on attraction and (2) the less powerful but clearly significant effect of attitude similarity-dissimilarity on attraction even when combined with evaluations in a face-to-face interaction. Serendipitously, the Aronson and Worchel study led to an extension of the generality of the attitude-attraction function.

One final point should be noted. In the Byrne & Rhamey (1965) paper, it was hypothesized that a given bit of information involving personal evaluation has a greater

Table 1. Mean Attraction Responses toward Confederate as a Function of Attitude Similarity and Expressed Liking of the Subject

	Like	Dislike
Similar (7-0)	12.30	7.86
Dissimilar (0-7)	10.40	5.62

Fig. 1. Attraction toward stooge as a linear function of proportion of positive reinforcements based on weighted combination of evaluation statements and attitude items.

effect on attraction than a similar bit of information involving attitudes about impersonal topics. This prediction was confirmed, and weighting coefficients equaling three for evaluation and one for attitudes were derived. A modified law of attraction was proposed: "...attraction toward X is a positive linear function of the sum of the weighted positive reinforcements (Number x Magnitude) received from X divided by the

total number of weighted positive and negative reinforcements received from X" (p. 887). In both the present work and that of Aronson and Worchel, each S received from the stooge seven units of attitudinal information and four units of evaluational information (enjoyed working with him, profound, interesting, well-informed or did not enjoy working with him, shallow, uninteresting, not well-informed). Each of the latter was assigned a weight of three, and attraction was plotted as a function of proportion of weighted positive reinforcements as shown in Fig. 1. A straight-line function was fitted to the data by the least squares method, yielding the formula $Y = 6.45X + 6.62$. It is clear that the results in a face-to-face situation correspond remarkably well to the noninteractive findings.

References

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