

# Attitude similarity and inferred attraction

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*Previous research has shown a strong relationship between attitude similarity and interpersonal attraction. Two interpretations of this relationship have been suggested: (1) Similar attitudes are directly rewarding, and we like those who reward us; and (2) attraction for self is inferred on the basis of attitude similarity, and we like those who like us. The present experiment demonstrated that Ss do assume they are liked more by similar others than by dissimilar others, thus supporting the second interpretation above. Since it is not clear, however, whether S's inference of liking for himself by the similar other preceded his liking for the other, the results do not eliminate the first interpretation of the similarity-attraction relationship. It is possible that attitude similarity leads S to simultaneous liking for the other and inference of liking for self.*

A number of recent studies on the determinants of interpersonal attraction have been done by Byrne and his associates (Byrne, 1961, 1962; Byrne & Wong, 1962; Byrne & Nelson, 1965; Byrne & Rhamey, 1965; Byrne & Griffitt, 1966). They have consistently found that the greater the proportion of similar attitudes between an S and a "mythical stranger," the more S likes the stranger. Their interpretation of this linear relationship is that similarity—agreement on attitudes—is rewarding, by providing consensual validation, and that liking for people is a direct, linear function of how rewarding they are.

Aronson & Worchel (1966) have recently suggested the possibility of another determinant of attraction, operating instead of or in addition to the one posed by Byrne. Aronson and Worchel suggest that the relationship between attitude similarity and attraction might be due, at least in part, to the fact that similarity provides S with a basis for the perception that he is liked, and this perceived (inferred) attraction of the stranger for S leads him to like the similar person.

In an experiment employing a 2 by 2 factorial design in which degree of a stimulus person's attitude similarity to S and expressed liking or disliking for S were varied, Aronson and Worchel found evidence that expressed liking or disliking for S (when manipulated independently of attitude similarity) had a strong influence on S's liking for the stimulus person. Attitude similarity had a relatively weaker impact on S's liking for the stimulus person, although, as Aronson and Worchel pointed out, "...it is conceivable that by increasing the number of attitude items, this effect could be strengthened..." (Reanalysis of Aronson and Worchel's data reveal the effect of similarity to be of borderline significance rather than not approaching significance, as reported.)

Aronson and Worchel are not in disagreement with Byrne when they expect statements of personal evaluation of S to have a greater effect than attitude similarity on S's liking for the stimulus person. In an earlier study (Byrne & Rhamey, 1965) positive and negative evaluations of S by another student, who was not present in the experimental situation, were treated as similar and dissimilar attitudes, respectively, but as much more powerful in their influence on attraction than ordinary agreement on attitude issues. Thus, both Aronson & Worchel and Byrne & Rhamey expect statements of positive and negative evaluation of S to have a more powerful effect than non-personal attitude similarity on attraction.

Disagreement does appear to remain, however, concerning the two interpretations of the similarity attraction relationship. It may be, of course, that both interpretations of the relationship are correct. It may be that similar attitudes provide both direct reward via consensual validation of our attitudes and indirect reward via inference that the person holding the similar attitudes likes us.

One other point should be raised before presenting our experiment. Aronson and Worchel have suggested that personal evaluation of S, whether positive or negative, may have more influence when it is delivered in person than when it is from a person not present whom S has never met. As Aronson and Worchel state the point, "Because O has never met P (S), P probably would not regard this evaluation as ego-enhancing or ego-threatening since O is evaluating P solely on the basis of examination of P's written attitudes." In Byrne's terms, they are suggesting that the weighting coefficient on statements of personal evaluation is not a fixed value, but rather increases when S is in face-to-face interaction with the person making the evaluation, a suggestion with which Byrne (1966) disagrees.

The present experiment was a 2 by 3 factorial design with three levels of attitude similarity and two types of stimulus persons: a real, live stimulus person and a "mythical stranger." The experiment attempted to test the following hypothesis, based upon Aronson and Worchel's reasoning: There is a direct, linear relationship between proportion of similar attitudes (between S and the stimulus person) and how much S thinks he is liked by the stimulus person (inferred attraction).

The variable, type of stimulus person, was incorporated into the design to determine, empirically, whether the impact of similarity on inferred attraction is stronger when a real stimulus person is employed.

## Subjects

The Ss used were 94 undergraduates registered for the summer session at the University of Texas. The

**Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of Inferred Attraction Scores by degree of Similarity and Type of Stimulus Person (SP).**

Type of SP	Degree of Similarity		
	2/7	4/7	6/7
Mythical SP	M = 5.9 SD = 1.4	M = 8.9 SD = 1.3	M = 11.3 SD = 1.1
Real SP	M = 6.5 SD = 1.8	M = 8.1 SD = 1.9	M = 11.5 SD = 1.1
All SP	M = 6.2	M = 8.5	M = 11.2

data from four Ss were discarded on the basis that they suspected that the real stranger's responses were preprogrammed. The remaining 90 Ss were evenly distributed among the six conditions.

#### Procedure

Each S was told that the experiment concerned the ability of people to predict the behavior of a stranger using limited information.

*Mythical stranger condition.* These Ss were seated, singly or in groups of two or three, at a table which was divided into quarters by a set of portable partitions which prevented them from seeing each other. Each S was asked to complete the Survey of Attitude Scale (Byrne, 1961) and push it through a slot in the partition to E. Upon receiving each S's questionnaire, E filled out a Survey of Attitude Scale which agreed with S's on two, four, or six of seven items. For the items disagreed upon, the amount of discrepancy was a constant three scale points. E explained to the Ss that he was copying their Survey of Attitude Scale, omitting their names, to use as later Ss' strangers. Each bogus questionnaire was then given to the appropriate S, who was then told that it was his stranger, whose behavior he was to try to predict.

*Real stranger condition.* Upon entering the experimental room, these Ss were introduced to a confederate (C), who posed as another S, and both S and C were instructed that each was the stranger whose behavior the other would be asked to predict. E then gave both S and C the Survey of Attitude Scale to complete. The partition prevented S from seeing C's actual responses. Upon completion, E asked S for his response to the first item along with any reasons or qualifications he cared to give. Then, C was asked the same question. The entire questionnaire was gone over in this manner, with C agreeing with S according to a prearranged schedule on two, four, or six of the seven items. All disagreements were again by three scale points.

*All conditions.* Following the information on the mythical, or real, stranger's attitudes, each S was provided with a questionnaire which required him to predict the stranger's behavior. Embedded in this questionnaire were two questions designed to measure how much S thought he would be liked by the stranger. For the last eight Ss in each condition, two questions designed to measure how much S liked the stranger were added.

Debriefing, in which S was told the true nature and purpose of the experiment, followed the completion of

each experimental session.

#### Results and Discussion

Analysis of variance was performed on the inferred attraction scores, revealing a significant main effect of similarity ( $F=100.9$ ,  $p < .001$ ), no significant main effect for type of stranger ( $F < 1$ ), and no significant interaction ( $F=1.69$ ). The linear trend for the similarity main effect was highly significant ( $F=201.0$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The quadratic trend was not significant ( $F < 1$ ). Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for the various conditions.

Thus, the hypothesis that attitude similarity leads S to believe that he would be liked by the similar person is strongly supported. The hypothesized linearity of that relationship also gained strong support. In addition, the measure of S's liking for the stranger, obtained on 48 of the 90 Ss, correlated  $+0.87$  with the inferred attraction measure.

It is important to note that these results do not allow us to say that attraction for the stranger is determined by the degree to which S perceives he is liked by the stranger. At the same time, both Aronson & Worchel and Byrne & Griffitt have shown that (1) statements of attraction for S have a statistically stronger effect than attitude similarity on S's attraction for the person making the statements, and (2) the effect of statements of attraction is independent of attitude similarity. Byrne has maintained that statements of positive attraction are simply another variety of attitude similarity, since S presumably likes himself. If Aronson and Worchel are correct, however, then it may be the case that attitude similarity simply provides a set of cues which leads S to infer positive attraction. In any case, this experiment certainly does not settle the disagreement between the two positions. It adds some support to the Aronson-Worchel position, but the possibility that both attraction and inferred attraction are determined by attitude similarity remains a viable one.

The empirical question concerning the effect of type of stimulus person received little clarification. Tentatively, we can conclude that when the real stimulus person makes no personal evaluations, his similarity or dissimilarity has no greater impact on S than that of the mythical stimulus person.

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