

Effect on opinion change of the communicator's liking for the audience he addressed*

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An experiment tested the hypothesis that if a speech originally addressed to one audience is given to another audience, the second audience will find the speech more persuasive if they believe that the communicator liked those he had originally addressed than if they think he disliked them. In support of the hypothesis, college women who read the same communication agreed more with the communicator's position when they were informed that he liked business students while disliking engineering students and addressing business students or that he liked engineering students while disliking business students and addressing engineering students than when they were informed that he disliked business students while liking engineering students and addressing business students or that he disliked engineering students while liking business students and addressing engineering students.

The purpose of the present study was to provide a more direct test of an assumption that was made in a recent study (Mills & Jellison, 1968) of the effect on opinion change of similarity between the communicator and the audience he addressed. Mills and Jellison tested the hypothesis that a communicator is more persuasive if the recipients of his message believe that he was similar to the audience he addressed. In support of this hypothesis, they found that college women who had read the same speech agreed more with the speaker's position when they thought he was a musician speaking to music students or an engineer speaking to engineering students than when they thought he was a musician speaking to engineering students or an engineer speaking to music students.

The reasoning behind the hypothesis of Mills and Jellison, that a communicator who is thought to be similar to his audience will be more persuasive, was that, "A similar communicator may be expected by the audience to be more sincere with them because they assume he feels a commonality with them and is more concerned about their welfare [1968, p. 153]." The implicit assumption was made by Mills and Jellison that a communicator will be regarded as more sincere and thus will be more persuasive if he is perceived as liking his audience. This assumption is broader than the idea (Mills, 1966) that a communicator will be more persuasive if the audience believes that he likes them. It assumes that when a

communicator is seen to like the audience he addresses, he will be more persuasive, even though the audience that actually receives the communication is not the same as the audience the communicator originally addressed.

The present study was designed to test the hypothesis that even when the audience is not the same as that originally addressed, a communicator will be more persuasive when the audience thinks he liked the audience originally addressed than when they think he disliked them.

DESIGN

College students read a speech favoring general education under four experimental conditions. In one condition, the speaker was described as liking business students while disliking engineering students and the audience addressed as business students. In a second condition, the speaker was described as liking engineering students while disliking business students and the audience as engineering students. In a third condition, the speaker was described as disliking business students while liking engineering students and the audience as business students. In a fourth condition, the speaker was described as disliking engineering students while liking business students and the audience as engineering students. Agreement with the communicator's position was measured after the Ss had rated his personality characteristics and completed a test of memory for what they had read.

The Ss were 128 women in three introductory psychology classes at Stephens College.¹ The experiment was conducted during their regular class sessions. Within each of the

classes, Ss were assigned randomly to the four experimental conditions. There were 32 Ss in each condition.

PROCEDURE

The E began by telling the Ss that the study concerned impression formation. Each of them would read a speech and then rate the personality of the person who had delivered it. Booklets were distributed containing a speech arguing that every college student should receive a broad, general education. The introduction to the speech was as follows: "The following speech was presented at an assembly of students enrolled in the school of [business, engineering] of a large state university. The speaker is a professional writer who was at the university for a year as a visiting member of the staff in the English Department. He was invited to address the assembly of [business, engineering] students by an assistant to the dean of the [business, engineering] school. After completing the arrangements for the assembly, the dean's assistant learned from a friend that he had [always admired, never cared for] students who majored in [business, engineering] although he had [never cared for, always admired] students who majored in a field such as [engineering, business]."

When the Ss had finished reading the speech booklets, the booklets were collected and each S was given a rating form with the same code number as on their speech booklet. The Ss were asked to indicate how well various characteristics applied to the speaker by circling a number on a scale from 0 (extremely inappropriate) to 20 (extremely appropriate) for each characteristic. The characteristics were: biased, competent, earnest, frank, friendly, impartial, likable, obliging, selfish, sincere, sympathetic, and unconventional. The Ss were told that their ratings would be kept completely confidential and were not asked to put their names on the rating forms.

After the Ss had completed the rating forms, the E told them that there was more to the study than he had mentioned at the beginning. He said that another purpose was to study the relationship between impressions of a person and memory for what the person had said. He was now going to pass out a memory questionnaire to determine how well they could recall exactly what the speaker had said in the speech. He explained that he could not reveal this earlier because, if he had, they might have made a special effort to memorize the speech. The Ss were warned that the memory test was difficult.

The rating forms were collected,

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and each S was given a booklet for the memory test with the same code number as on her speech booklet and rating form. The Ss were not asked to put their names on the memory test booklet. The first section of the booklet contained 23 multiple-choice type questions with three alternatives each. The Ss were instructed to choose the word or phrase that completed each statement in the way that was closest to what had been said in the speech.

Two items were included in the memory questionnaire to check whether the information designed to manipulate the independent variables was understood. These were:

The speech was presented at an assembly of students in a school of

- a. education
- b. engineering
- c. business

He (the speaker) had always admired students who majored in

- a. education
- b. engineering
- c. business

After all the memory test booklets were distributed, the E interrupted the Ss and said he should have mentioned that the last page of the booklet was included to get their personal reactions to some statements in order to see if there was a relationship between personal reactions and memory. Some of the Ss invariably turned to the last page, and the E immediately cautioned everyone not to look at the last page until they had answered all of the memory items and not to return to the memory items once they had begun to give their personal reactions. The last page contained 10 Likert-type items concerning general vs specialized education with 7 alternatives from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." Six of the items were pro general education and the other four were anti general education. A measure of favorability to general education was calculated by assigning scores from +3 to -3 to the alternatives for each item and then summing over the 10 items; the more positive the score, the greater the favorability to general education.

After the Ss had answered all the items in the booklet, the E asked them to write a few sentences on the back describing their reactions to the study. He told them that they could say anything they wanted to about the study. None of the comments indicated suspicion of the procedure. Finally, before dismissing the Ss, the E explained the necessity of their not

Table 1
Means for the Measure of Agreement with the Communicator's Position

Communicator	Audience Addressed	
	Business Students	Engineering Students
Liked Business Students, Disliked Engineering Students	9.5 (7.6)	4.9 (10.7)
Liked Engineering Students, Disliked Business Students	7.4 (8.2)	9.3 (9.7)

Note—The higher the score, the greater the agreement with the communicator's position. Each mean is based on an N of 32. Standard deviations given in parentheses.

discussing the experiment with anyone.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results for the questions concerning the audience the speaker addressed originally and the speaker's liking for them indicate that the manipulations were generally successful. For the question concerning the audience originally addressed, 111 of the 128 Ss (87%) answered correctly. For the question concerning the communicator's liking for business and engineering students, 117 Ss (92%) answered correctly.

Before presenting the results for the measure of agreement with the communicator's position, it should be mentioned that the conditions did not differ in recall of the content of the speech. Analysis of variance of the number of correct answers on the memory test did not yield any significant differences. The Ss averaged approximately 15 correct answers for the 21 items dealing with the content of the speech.

From the hypothesis it was expected that the Ss would agree more closely with the communicator's position when he liked the students he originally addressed than when he disliked them. The means for the measure of favorability to general education for the four experimental conditions are presented in Table 1. It can be seen from Table 1 that, as expected, agreement with the communicator's position was greater in the liked-business, disliked-engineering/addressed business and the liked-engineering, disliked-business/addressed-engineering conditions than in the liked-business, disliked-engineering/addressed-engineering and the liked-engineering, disliked-business/addressed-business conditions.

Analysis of variance revealed that the interaction between the communicator's liking for business and engineering students and the audience originally addressed was significant at the .05 level ($F = 3.94$, $df = 1/124$). Neither of the main effects approached significance. The results provide good support for the hypothesis that even when the audience

is not the same as that originally addressed, a communicator will be more persuasive when the audience thinks he liked the audience originally addressed than when they think he disliked them.

The hypothesis was based on the assumption that a communicator will be perceived as being more sincere if the audience thinks he liked those he originally addressed. The adjectives "earnest," "frank," and "sincere" were included among the characteristics on which Ss rated the communicator as a possible check on this assumption. As in the previous study by Mills & Jellison (1968), there were no significant differences in the ratings for earnest, frank, or sincere. The explanation proposed by Mills and Jellison to account for the lack of differences for these adjectives in the previous study would apply equally here.

Since the Ss were asked to rate how well the characteristics generally applied to the communicator and not how well they specifically applied when he was giving the speech, they may not provide a very sensitive test of the assumption. It was not assumed that a communicator who liked the audience he originally addressed would be perceived as a more sincere person in general, but only that he would be perceived as communicating more sincerely in the particular situation.

The only significant difference for any of the ratings was a significant interaction ($p < .05$) for the ratings for "friendly." The communicator was rated as more friendly in the liked-business, disliked-engineering/addressed-business and the liked-engineering, disliked-business/addressed-engineering conditions than in the liked-business, disliked-engineering/addressed-engineering and the liked-engineering, disliked-business/addressed-business conditions. This result is rather puzzling, since the speaker was described as liking some students and disliking others in each of the conditions. Perhaps the Ss were rating the speaker's friendliness at the time he gave the speech rather than his friendliness in general. If so, it is

somewhat strange that there were no differences in the ratings of the speaker's sincerity.

Although there is no evidence from the ratings that the communicator was perceived as being more sincere when he liked the audience he originally addressed, it is difficult to account for the differences in agreement with the communicator's position without making this assumption. In any case, the results provide good support for

the implicit assumption made by Mills and Jellison in the previous study of the effect on opinion change of similarity between the communicator and the audience he originally addressed, i.e., that a communicator will be more persuasive if he is perceived as liking his audience.

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NOTE

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