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Interpersonal attraction as a function of attitude similarity dissimilarity and attitude extremity

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This experiment tested the effects of attitude extremity on the functional relationship between level of attitude similarity and interpersonal attraction. It was predicted that persons exhibiting greater attitude extremity would be more attracted to a "bogus" stranger who expressed similar attitudes and less attracted to a stranger expressing dissimilar attitudes than Ss holding more neutral attitudes. The results showed a significant main effect of attitude similarity on attraction, but the hypothesized interaction with attitude extremity was not found to be significant. The data were discussed in the context of other findings in the area.

Recent field and laboratory research across widely different experimental conditions has confirmed the hypothesis that interpersonal attraction is functionally related to attitude similarity (Berscheid & Walster, 1969; Byrne, 1969; Newcomb, 1961). However, with the exception of a few studies (e.g., Byrne, 1965), there has been little focus on individual differences among Ss and their interactions with similarity in determining attraction. One of such parameters that needs to be investigated is the extremity of position of the experimental S on the attitude items in which a stranger expresses attitude similarity or dissimilarity.

The concept of "extremity" is theoretically related to a number of variables which apparently refer to similar attitudinal properties. In effect, different authors have used such terms as intensity, personal importance, ego involvement, extremity, etc. (e.g., Hollander, 1967; Newcomb, Turner, & Converse, 1965; Sherif & Sherif, 1969) to describe magnitudinal characteristics of attitudes. Also, Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum (1957) have equated extreme responses on the semantic differential with attitude intensity, and Weksel & Hennes (1965) have found that although intensity and polarity are not equivalent, they are very significantly correlated. In

addition, most authors consider those magnitudinal properties and their relationships to behavior to be among the most relevant functional characteristics of attitudes.

Interestingly enough, such a preeminent concept in the attitude literature as "topic importance" has not been consistently found to affect the similarity-attraction relationship. In several incisive experiments, Byrne and his associates have demonstrated that the importance of the issue on which agreement occurred affected attraction (i.e., interacted with attitude similarity) only when the same person agreed/disagreed on items of different importance (Byrne, London, & Griffitt, 1968; Clore & Baldridge, 1968) but *not* when the importance of the items differed for different target persons and the items on which a given person agreed/disagreed had a uniform level of importance (Byrne & Nelson, 1964, 1965). Thus, apparently, the effects of topic importance, at least as a stimulus-manipulated variable, are limited only to certain paradigms of agreement-disagreement (e.g., the so-called intrastranger design).

Recently, Gormley & Clore (1969) investigated the effects on attraction of agreement-disagreement in different items on which the Ss exhibited extreme or neutral responses. The types of items (i.e., extreme or neutral) on which a bogus stranger agreed/disagreed with the Ss did not affect attraction scores. However, this study did not address itself to determining the effects of attitude extremity as an organismic or individual-differences variable (i.e., the S's attitude extremity on a given issue).

The purpose of the present experiment is to test the effects of attitude extremity, as an organismic variable, on the similarity-attraction relationship. Based on the theoretically and empirically established relationship between extremity and other magnitudinal properties of attitudes (i.e., intensity, importance, degree of ego involvement, etc.), it can be predicted that the Ss' attitude extremity will affect the similarity-attraction function. Specifically, it is hypothesized that persons holding more extreme attitudes will develop greater attraction to those persons who express similar attitudes and lower attraction to those with discrepant attitudes than will persons who hold more neutral positions.

Since the "importance" variable has been found to be highly susceptible to experimental design variations (Byrne, 1969), testing the effects of extremity under the methodological conditions of this experiment (i.e., measuring

individual differences in attitude extremity) should help to establish the extent to which magnitudinal properties of attitudes are relevant parameters of the functional relationship between attitude similarity and interpersonal attraction.

SUBJECTS

The Ss were 120 male and female undergraduate students from an introductory psychology course at the University of Florida. Twelve Ss (four from each level of similarity) were eliminated either because postexperimental questionnaires revealed understanding of the hypothesis or for failure to follow instructions.

PROCEDURE

The Ss were recruited for an experiment on "interpersonal prediction." After answering a Florida political beliefs scale (PBS) (Shaw & Wright, 1967), each S was given several irrelevant questionnaires to fill out, and while he was completing this task, a second E was preparing a bogus PBS which reflected 20%, 50%, or 80% agreement, depending on the condition to which the S had been assigned. The discrepancy manipulation was performed by displacing the responses on a given number of items 3 scale units (on a 5-point Likert-type scale) away from the S's answers. Finally, the S was given the PBS, presumably answered by another S, with instructions stating that he was engaged in an experiment on "interpersonal prediction" and that his task was to rate (on a series of scales provided) the person who had answered the PBS. The S then gave his ratings on the interpersonal judgment scale (IJS) (Byrne, 1961), which includes a measure of attraction (i.e., ratings of liking and desire to work together) plus other items dealing with interpersonal evaluation (i.e., intelligence, knowledge of current events, morality, and adjustment).

RESULTS

Analyses of variance were performed on the attraction scores and on the (total) evaluation scores, based on three degrees of agreement (20%, 50%, and 80%) and two levels of extremity (high and low). The results are shown in Tables 1 and 2. A significant main effect of agreement on both the attraction scores (sum of items on liking and coworking, $F = 18.72$, $df = 2/102$, $p < .01$) and the total evaluation scores (sum of all items in the PBS, $F = 27.78$, $df = 2/102$, $p < .01$) was found, demonstrating again the ubiquity of the similarity-attraction relationship. A nonsignificant trend appeared for the main effect of extremity on the total evaluation scores, and no trend or significant effect of extremity was

Table 1
Means of Attraction Scores for Three Degrees of Similarity and Two Levels of Attitude Extremity

	Degree of Similarity		
	.20	.50	.80
High Extremity	5.11	7.11	8.28
Low Extremity	5.78	6.89	8.84

Table 2
Means of Total Evaluative Scores for Three Degrees of Similarity and Two Levels of Attitude Extremity

	Degree of Similarity		
	.20	.50	.80
High Extremity	17.28	20.50	25.11
Low Extremity	19.67	21.78	26.06

found on the attraction scores. Finally, contrary to predictions, no significant interaction was found between extremity and agreement on the attraction or on the evaluation scores.

DISCUSSION

The failure to obtain the predicted extremity interaction on the similarity-attraction relationship might be viewed in different ways. One alternative is that the subpopulation from which the sample was drawn may not have included a representative number of highly ego-involved Ss. In accord with this position, some authors have contended that college volunteer Ss give low extremity responses (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1969), and others have suggested that the effects of extremity are found only when actually existing groups with high levels of involvement are selected for investigation (Zimbardo & Ebbesen, 1969).

Another possibility is that the effect of attitude similarity is so powerful that individual differences among Ss do not produce any significant variation in attraction. A number of studies have failed to demonstrate the influence of individual difference variables (e.g., dogmatism, authoritarianism, and conceptual complexity) on the similarity-attraction function (Baskett, 1966, 1968; Byrne, 1965). Also, in Nelson's (1965) unpublished doctoral dissertation, no relationship was found between levels of extremity and attraction. Taken together, the results of these experiments seem to suggest that the similarity-attraction relationship is resistant to individual differences and definitely point out

the particular significance of attitude similarity in determining interpersonal attraction.

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