DOCUMENT RESUME

ABSTRACT
              Most studies of interpersonal attraction and
rejection have come to the unremarkable conclusion that persons who
are perceived as similar to one's self in beliefs and values are
liked better than those perceived as dissimilar. This experiment was
designed to vary in an orthogonal design (1) perceived similarity
between a subject and another person, and (2) classically acquired
attitudes toward that person. After receiving treatments which
conditioned a positive, negative or neutral attitude toward a name,
the subjects interacted with another person bearing that name who was
made to appear similar or dissimilar to the subject. The subject then
expressed acceptance or rejection of the other person. In this way,
the effects of similarity-dissimilarity and conditioned affect could
be assessed independently. The results support the view that
perceived similarity is a determinant of attraction among people and
tend also to support earlier findings (Berkowitz and Knurek) that
attitudes conditioned to a name generalize to a person bearing that
name, at least when the degree of similarity of that person to the
subject is not made salient. (Author/TA)

The Relationship of Belief Similarity to Attraction

Following Conditioning and Generalization of Affect[1]

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Most studies of interpersonal attraction and rejection have come
to the unremarkable conclusion that persons who are perceived as
similar to one's self in beliefs and values are liked better than those
who are dissimilar. Explanations for the finding have generally gone
in one of two directions. One point of view is that the person, the
other, and the belief or value constitute a closed system in which
cognitive balance is preferred to imbalance (e.g. Newcomb, 1956). The
other approach has emphasized learning theory in that it regards
positive or negative attitudes toward another person as conditioned
responses with the person as CS and "similarity", which is assumed to
be a rewarding state, as UCS. Thus, the rewarding properties of "being
agreed with" generalize to the person who does the agreeing (Byrne and
Clore, 1971).

The present experiment was designed to vary in an orthogonal
design (1) perceived similarity between a subject and another person
and (2) classically acquired attitudes toward that person. After
receiving treatments which conditioned a positive, negative, or
neutral attitude toward a name, Ss interacted with another person
bearing that name who was made to appear similar or dissimilar to
S. S then expressed acceptance or rejection of the other person. By
means of this design, the effects of similarity-dissimilarity and
conditioned affect could be assessed independently.

We were particularly interested in the way in which the two
independent variables are related to each other. If perceived
similarity to another person produces liking for the person according
to a classical conditioning model, the two variables should be related
additively because positive affect which is a CR to the other person
should summate with similar positive affect acquired through previous
association of the person with a different UCS. On the other hand,
any departures from additivity would suggest some alternative explana-
tion to that derived from classical conditioning. For example, a
combination of previously conditioned positive affect for a person and
perceived dissimilarity to him could create a state of cognitive
conflict. The effects of such conflict might not be predictable from
a simple assumption that similarity breeds affection through associa-
tion. Resolution of such possible conflict could add still another
dimension to the problem of why similar others are liked more than
dissimilar others.

Method

Fifty-four female Ss were run in 18 groups of 3. None of the
3 Ss within each group knew the names of the other two and all 3 were
isolated from each other in separate cubicles immediately after
entering the laboratory. The experiment was described as one on "how
people form impressions of each other" and was described as consisting
of two parts. In the first, each S would attempt to learn some
pertinent facts about other people while being distracted by irrelevant
information. A paired associates learning task was used. Each S
observed a screen placed before all 3 cubicles on which 12 S terms

(first names of girls) and 12 R terms (names of girls' residence halls
at the university) appeared. As the S term appeared, the "distracting
stimulus" was presented orally by E and received via headphones by the
Ss. This consisted of an adjective which pretesting had shown to be
either pleasant (e.g. "good", "compassionate", "happy"), or unpleasant
("treacherous", "violent"), or neutral ("tall", "early"). S was
instructed to repeat the word to herself silently as soon as she had
heard it. A total of 16 trials was run, with a different adjective
paired with each name on each trial.

The first independent variable was introduced at this point. For
one-third of the groups, the name "Nancy" was paired with pleasant
words on 14 of the 16 trials and with neutral words on the other 2.
We shall call this the Positive Conditioning treatment. For another
third, the name "Nancy" was paired with unpleasant words on 14 trials
and with neutral words on the other 2. This will be called the Negative Conditioning treatment. For the final third of the Ss, "Nancy"
was paired with neutral words on 14 trials, with a pleasant word on
one trial and with an unpleasant word on one. This will be called the
Neutral Conditioning treatment. Each other name on the list was
paired with pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral words approximately one-
third of the time, according to a random assignment of words to trials.

The second part of the experiment involved a simulated group
discussion in which each S was told to express her opinion on a
controversial statement after which she would learn opinions of the
other 2 Ss. A modified 3-station Crutchfield apparatus was used, by
which S could express "agree" or "disagree" with any one of 12 state-
ments presented on the screen. Each S was instructed privately that

she was to be the first to respond. E then explained that the opinions

of the other two Ss would appear on two sets of lights, and he labelled

each set with what were said to be the names of the other Ss. Actually,

he labelled one set "Nancy" and the other "Jane", a name not previously

associated with the experiment. On the 12 attitude items, Nancy was

made to agree with S on 10 for one-third of the Ss, and on 2 with

another third of the Ss. The other third of the Ss were given no

feedback on the opinions of the other Ss. These treatments represent

the second independent variable and will be designated the Similar,

Dissimilar, and No Treatment groups, respectively.

Each S was then given a questionnaire containing 2 copies of

Byrne's Interpersonal Judgment Scale (Byrne, 1966) and two items by

which she expressed the degree to which she perceived Nancy and Jane

to be similar to herself. The latter was a check on the effectiveness

of the similarity manipulation while the Byrne scales were the means

by which S expressed liking for Nancy and Jane.

The experiment was concluded by E's interviewing each S to

determine whether the experimental deceptions had been successful and

to inform each girl of the true nature of the experiment.

Results and Discussion

Results on each item consisted of a seven-point scalescore with

the content of the measurement determined by the nature of the question.

Since Ss were run in 2 groups of 3 Ss each within each of the 9 cells

of the 3 x 3 design, results were analyzed according to a 3 x 3 x 2

analysis of variance with groups nested within the two treatment

variables. Mean scores rating "Jane" revealed no variance due to

treatments for any question. Ratings of "Nancy" produced significant differences among groups on two items, the ones measuring perceived similarity and overall likeability. Analysis of perceived similarity scores revealed a significant main effect for the Similarity-Dissimilarity manipulation only (F=7.12, df=2, 9, p<.05), showing that this manipulation was successful. When Nancy had agreed with $\underline{S}$ on 10 of 12 items she was rated as more similar to $\underline{S}$ than when she had agreed on 2 of 12. Results for the item measuring liking for Nancy, with a low scalescore representing greater liking, appear in Figure 1. A significant main effect for Similarity-Dissimilarity was found (F=4.75, df=2,

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          Insert Figure 1 about here
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9, p<.05), indicating that Nancy was liked more when similar to $\underline{S}$ than when dissimilar. The interaction between the Similarity and Conditioning variables was also significant (F=4.29, df=2, 9, p<.05). A further analysis for main effects was made by analyzing differences across each variable within what was essentially the no-treatment group on the other variable. In this way it was found that the difference between $\underline{Ss}$ in the Similar-Neutral Conditioning and Dissimilar-Neutral Conditioning groups was significant (t=2.79, df=10, p<.05) and that the difference between the Positive Conditioning-No Treatment and Negative Conditioning-No Treatment groups reached borderline significance (t=1.95, df=10, p=.075).

The results of the experiment support the view that perceived similarity is a determinant of attraction among people. They also tend somewhat to support the earlier findings of Berkowitz and Knurek

(1969) that attitudes conditioned to a name generalize to a person
bearing that name, at least when the degree of similarity of that
person to the subject is not made salient. The interaction between
the two variables results from the fact that a similar other to whose
name a positive attitude had been conditioned was preferred to a
similar other to whose name a negative attitude had been conditioned,
whereas a dissimilar other was preferred after a negative attitude
had been conditioned to her name.

The reasons for this interaction are not readily apparent since
it cannot be predicted either from a simple cognitive consistency
model or a classical conditioning approach. We propose that cognitive
balance is involved, but as the first step in a two-stage process.
When the degree of similarity of another person to the self is in-
consistent with previously existing feelings for the other person, a
state of tension is created. This tension produces aversion which
then becomes associated with objects in the siutation, including the
other person. To explain this further, consider the two conditions in
which Nancy is relatively well liked by $\underline{S}$ (Positive Conditioning-
Similar and Negative Conditioning-Dissimilar). As indicated in Figure
2, both of these conditions represent balanced states which should

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Insert Figure 2 about here

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create a condition of cognitive consistency, the rewarding effects of
which could generalize to Nancy and cause her to be liked. In the
same way, the conditions Negative Conditioning-Similar and Positive
Conditioning-Dissimilar are unbalanced states producing aversion which
would likewise generalize to Nancy and make her unattractive.

The results fail to support the theory of Byrne and his colleagues.
Had the similarity-dissimilarity manipulation merely produced positive
or negative conditioned affect for Nancy, this affect should have
summated with the conditioned affect arising from the previous condi-
tioning treatment. It should be pointed out, of course, that Byrne
and his colleagues have generally paired agreeable or disagreeable
statements with stimuli which had been hitherto neutral in affect.
Our data for Ss who had received no prior conditioning reveal the same
general effect for similarity as that found in Byrne's work. However,
we believe that our data also show that any discussion of the implica-
tions of perceived similarity-dissimilarity for interpersonal attraction
must take into account possible pre-existing attitudes toward the
persons involved. Under such conditions a two-step process involving
cognitive consistency and cognitively engendered conflict may accurately
predict the outcome.

Footnotes

[1] Paper presented at annual convention of Midwest Psychological Association, Detroit, Michigan, May, 1970. The study was supported by Grant GS-2743 from the National Science Foundation to the senior author.

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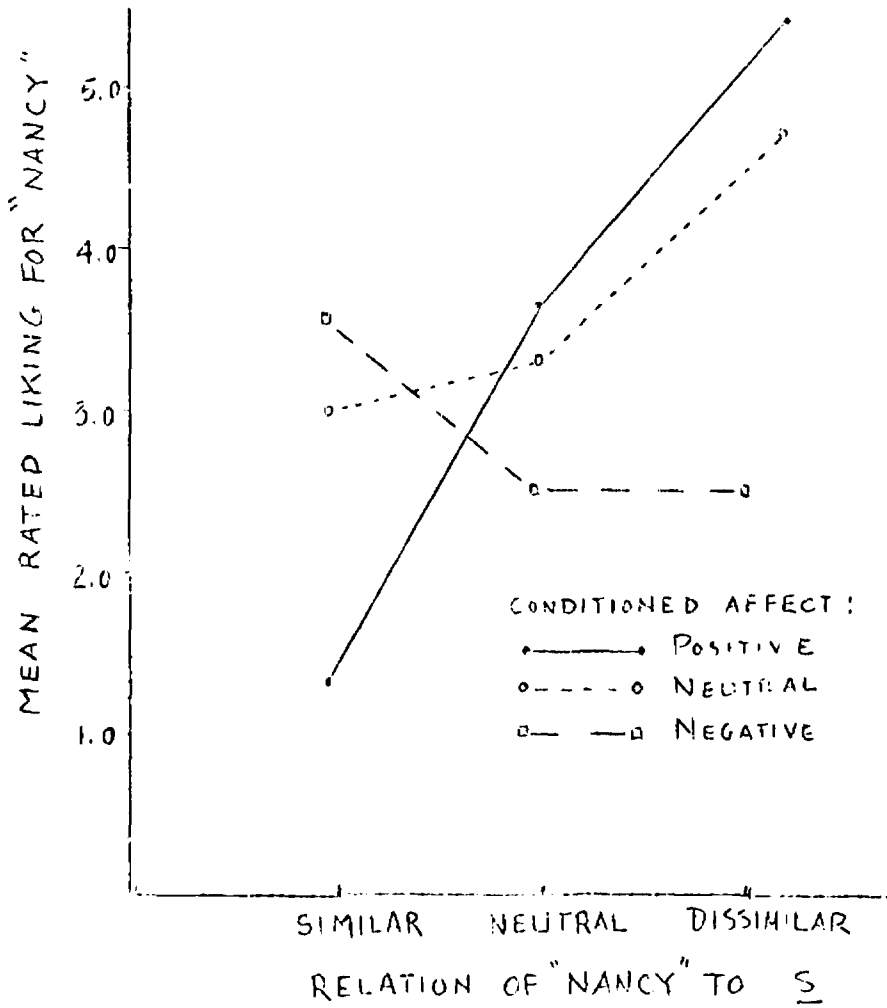Newcomb, T. M. The prediction of interpersonal attraction. <u>American
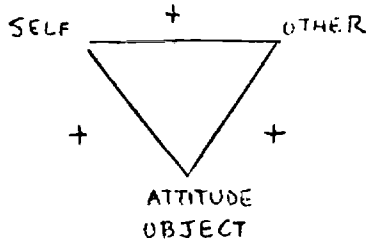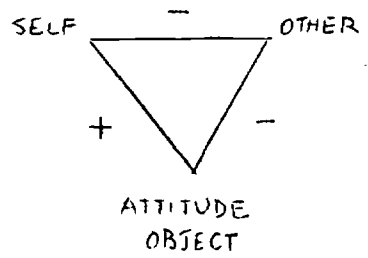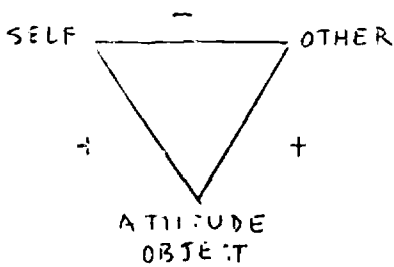Psychologist</u>. 1956. 11, 575-596.

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Fig. 1. Ratings of Liking for 'Nancy'

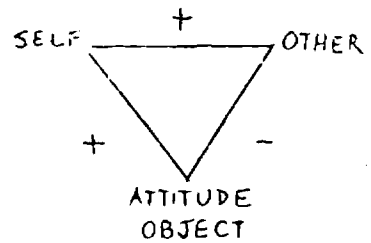SELF ——— + ——— OTHER
+   +
ATTITUDE
OBJECT

a. Other similar,
Positive affect

SELF ——— — ——— OTHER
+   —
ATTITUDE
OBJECT

b. Other dissimilar,
Negative affect

SELF ——— — ——— OTHER
-        +
ATTITUDE
OBJECT

c. Other similar,
Negative affect

SELF ——— + ——— OTHER
+   —
ATTITUDE
OBJECT

d. Other dissimilar,
Positive affect

Fig. 2. Experimental Conditions
in Terms of Balance Theory

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