Attraction and Repulsion: The effects of similarity and dissimilarity on liking another person

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between similarity, dissimilarity, and attraction. Participants were shown a bogus other's interview responses that were generated to appear similar or dissimilar to the participant's responses. The participants then reported their attraction to, and willingness to be friends with the other person. A control group reported their perceptions of the average NDSU student. ANOVAs were used to examine the hypothesis that similarity increases attraction while dissimilarity has no effect.

Introduction

The present study asks how similarity and dissimilarity influence liking of another person.

Similarity, Dissimilarity, and Attraction: Examining attraction as the probable liking of a stranger, Byrne and Nelson (1965) found that there is a linear relationship between similarity and attraction. However, Rosenbaum (1986) offered another perspective when he found that attraction is not increased by similarity, but that repulsion results from dissimilarity.

Problem: Previous studies are limited by inadequate (Smeaton et al, 1989) or inherently dissimilar-other (Rosenbaum, 1986) control conditions.

Hypothesis: We hypothesize that model similarity increases observer attraction to the model, while model dissimilarity does not contribute to attraction or repulsion relative to an "average other" control condition.

Methods

During a standardized interview, participants were asked to listen to five pieces of music and to rate each one on a scale from –10 (dislike very much) to +10 (like very much). Participants also rated their liking of five activities. The computer generated either similar (within two) or dissimilar (±4 or more) ratings for each piece of music and each activity. Participants compared their ratings of the songs and activities to the bogus participants. Participants in the no model condition received no questionnaires for comparison.

Researchers then presented participants with a bogus-participant's (the model) questionnaire responses that were either similar or dissimilar to the participant's. Participants reported how similar they felt to the bogus-participant, how much they liked the bogus-participant, and how likely they would be friends with the bogus participant. There was also a no model condition that answered the same questions in relation to "the average NDSU student".

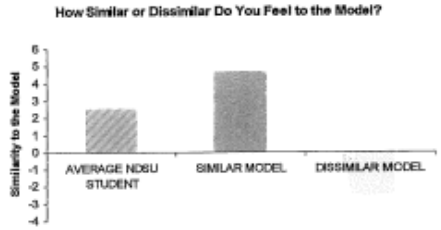
Results

The data were analyzed using one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) followed by Tukey HSD post hoc analyses.

Manipulation Checks

Similarity. The one-way ANOVA showed that there was a significant difference among the three conditions, $F(2,180)=67.76$, $p<.001$ (see Figure 1). Post hoc analyses revealed all three groups differed from one another ($ps<.05$).

Figure 1.



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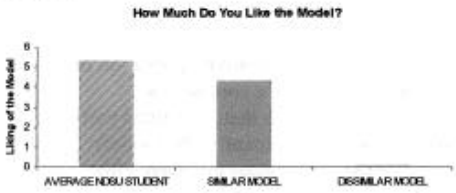
Primary Analyses

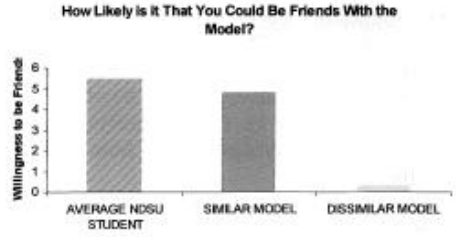
Liking of the model. There was an effect of condition on how much participants reported liking the other person, $F(2, 175)=36.99$, $p< .001$ (see Figure 2). Tukey HSD post hoc analyses showed that there was a difference between the dissimilar model and similar model, and the dissimilar model and average NDSU student conditions ($ps< .05$). There was no significant difference between the similar model and average student conditions ($p>.05$).

Figure 2.



Willingness to be friends with the model. A one-way ANOVA revealed an effect of condition on how willing participants were to be friends with the other person, $F(2, 175)=32.12$, $p< .001$ (see Figure 3). The post hoc analyses found a pattern similar to that for the liking of the model dependent variable with the dissimilar model condition being significantly different from the similar model and average student conditions ($ps< .05$).

Figure 3.



Discussion

Contrary to the hypothesis, the results suggest that relative to an average-other control condition, a similar other does not increase attraction, but dissimilarity decreases attraction (increases repulsion).

Despite participants' perceptions of the similar model as being more similar to themselves than the "average NDSU student," there was no difference in how much participants liked or were willing to be friends with the average NDSU student and the similar model. Participants did report liking the dissimilar model less and were less willing to be friends with the dissimilar model relative to the similar model and average student.

The findings suggest that a majority of people consider more factors than just similarity when forming opinions about others. However, any dissimilar qualities persuade people to react negatively toward others. Perhaps we try to distance ourselves from those who are like us in order to preserve our sense of identity. On the other hand, we may also distance ourselves from those who are not like us because we crave a sense of belonging.

References

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